

# Country Report

VIET NAM

Independent semi-annual information on politics,  
economy and society of a country in transition

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## The Implementation of Governmental Policies in Vietnam



**USSH**  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KHOA HỌC XÃ HỘI VÀ NHÂN VĂN, HÀ NỘI  
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### Country Report Vietnam

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## Foreword



**Prof. Dr. Hoang Anh Tuan**

In a rapidly changing world marked by interconnected challenges—ranging from environmental crises to socio-economic inequalities—there is an increasing need for informed research that bridges academic knowledge and practical solutions. This publication serves as a testament to the strength of international collaboration in navigating these pressing issues. It brings together diverse perspectives, rigorous analysis, and innovative approaches, offering valuable insights not only for policymakers and academics but also for the broader public who engage with the realities of these challenges.

Since its establishment, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi has proactively implemented research and policy consulting activities, contributing to the policy making process of the Communist Party of Vietnam, State agencies and other stakeholders. The Country Report: The Implementation of Governmental Policies in Vietnam is part of a series of Country Reports on Vietnam's socio-economic issues, compiled and published by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University, Hanoi and Justus Liebig Giessen University (JLU), with the support of Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) in Vietnam. The partnership between USSH, JLU, and HSF reflects a shared vision of fostering dialogue, promoting interdisciplinary research, and creating actionable knowledge. By transcending geographical and disciplinary boundaries, this collaboration demonstrates the power of collective effort in advancing understanding and contributing to sustainable development.

On behalf of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, I extend my gratitude to all contributors for their dedication and expertise, and to the Hanns Seidel Foundation for its unwavering support in facilitating this joint initiative. I am confident that this publication will inspire further dialogue, research, and action, serving as a valuable resource for those who seek to build a more inclusive and sustainable future.

**Prof. Dr. Hoang Anh Tuan**

**Rector**

**University of Social Sciences and Humanities**

**Vietnam National University, Hanoi**

## Foreword



**Michael Siegner**

Policy implementation essentially describes a translation process from a piece of paper to concrete action. The success or failure of political initiatives are usually not judged by the quality of the policy document itself but by the actual impact. Hereby it is common to notice a 'gap' between the initial plan and what occurs because of policy implementation. Designing policies that keep this gap as small as possible is a challenge that cuts across sectors and administrative levels. Political programmes are never stand-alone systems, but their impact primarily depends on how they fit into the wider regulatory framework. Hence, effective coordination with diverse stakeholders in the design stage of a policy is crucial for success. While policy makers and regulators are not omniscient agents who are able to precisely foresee all consequences of a policy, they still can narrow the implementation gap by cross-sectoral consultations, stakeholder engagement and the involvement of external experts. This is even more important in countries that are rapidly developing their regulatory framework in all spheres of society. Given the fast-paced development of Vietnam in the past decades, the country is a fascinating case to examine policy implementation.

Against this background, this volume of the Country Report provides several snapshots of important sectors from an implementation perspective. By doing so, this volume contributes to the nascent field of implementation research in Vietnam while also offering practical insights into the status quo of policy implementation in the analyzed fields and sectors.

The Country Report is a product of our partnership with the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU Hanoi) and the Justus-Liebig University of Gießen (JLU Gießen). On behalf of the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this edition of the Country Report series. First, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang of the USSH and PD Dr. Detlef Briesen of the JLU Gießen who have devoted a great deal of time, efforts and enthusiasm to this project. I would also like to say thanks to all contributors and authors. Finally, I would like to extend a special thanks to Ms. Trinh Ngoc Mai of HSF Vietnam for the tireless coordination of this project.

**Michael Siegner**

**Resident Representative**

**Hanns Seidel Foundation in Vietnam**



## Editorial



Detlef Briesen

This edition of the Country Report focuses on the *implementation* of governmental policies in Vietnam. Implementation is a technical term in the social sciences. The corresponding field of research targets the issue how governments and other state institutions try to actively influence social reality through laws, regulations and other measures, for example, to address social, economic, educational or environmental issues. On the other hand, a key goal of such research is to determine how successful these institutions are in doing so. In addition, scientifically based proposals for solutions or improvements are to be developed. Implementation research is thus confronted with very relevant challenges for society as a whole – it is certainly one of the central areas of a multidisciplinary social science.

In Vietnam, the implementation of governmental policies is an emerging research area with many new and extremely important issues, given the rapid transformation of the country and the associated societal changes, to which the different levels of government are developing answers. Regarding the pace of contemporary development, as in Germany, it is also becoming apparent in Vietnam how challenging the way is from the politically adopted measures to their actual implementation and the achievement of the desired results.

Our current volume documents some of the central areas of implementation research in Vietnam and draws comparisons with Germany and Europe. Thus, it mirrors an important scientific discourse taking place in the country and worldwide.

As always, the editors would like to thank the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Hanoi for making our project possible, in particular Mr. Michael Siegner – Resident Representative of HSF – and Ms. Trinh Ngoc Mai, Program Director. Our sincere thanks also go to the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, in particular to Professor Rector Hoang Anh Tuan and to all the authors who contributed to the Country Report.

Detlef Briesen

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Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang

Description: Vietnam National Assembly building

Source: iStock.com/Paul Chu





POLICY

Looking for Fitting Policies  
Source: iStock.com/Minwan  
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# From Governmental Steering to Regulatory Policies: The Implementation of Governmental Policies

● Detlef Briesen

The seventh issue of the Country Report Vietnam deals with the implementation of governmental policies, again with the focus on Vietnam.. There are many synonyms for implementation in European languages, in English for example realisation, enforcement, practical application, fulfilment and enactment.

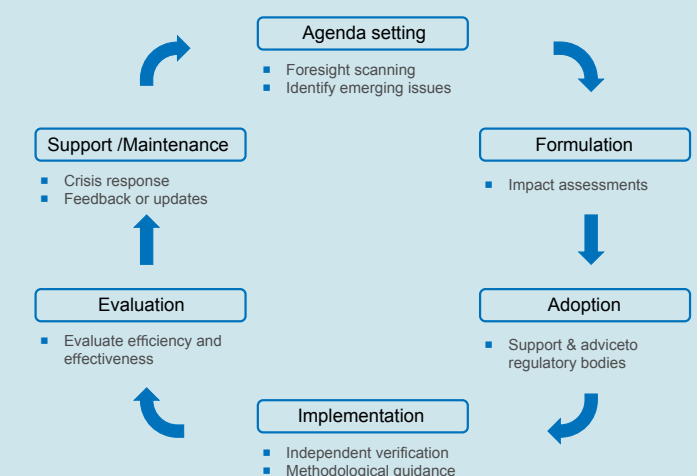
All of these refer to the execution or practice of a plan, method or design, idea, model, specification, standard or policy for doing something. Here in this Country Report, we are concerned with policies. Implementation of governmental policies (in the German tradition called implementation of political programmes) is a technical term from political and administrative science which refers to a level of action that follows political decision-making. Implementation therefore denotes realising the content of the state's political measures. Related terms are regulatory policy approaches and public management. Both are explained in more detail below.

The starting point of our new volume on the actual execution of government plans is an important observation: it is obvious that governments everywhere in the world try to influence social life in a variety of ways through decisions and their subsequent enactment. Important means for this are above all laws, which are passed by parliaments in most countries of the world, as well as decrees implementing these laws which can also be issued by the government of a country or its sub-organisations. This policymaking is then followed by the institutionalisation of policies by authorities. However, every citizen can give examples from his or her everyday life that such measures cannot always be implemented successfully. There are so-called enforcement deficits, which are more prevalent in some policy areas and less common in others.

However, this is by no means to be understood as a fundamental criticism of all governance: Government action is by no means futile from the outset. The implementation deficits rather point to the complexity of (today's) governance: Many different actors are involved, and the societal contexts are often highly complex. This is one of the reasons why there can be considerable differences between the declared objectives of governmental programmes and their actual implementation.

Vietnam aims to develop universal social policies for sustainable national development  
Source: <https://vovworld.vn/en-US/vietnams-chosen-path/vietnam-aims-to-develop-universal-social-policies-for-sustainable-national-development-1241117.vov>

The policy cycle  
Source: <https://publicpolicydesign.blog.gov.uk/2023/02/09/what-does-policy-making-look-like/>



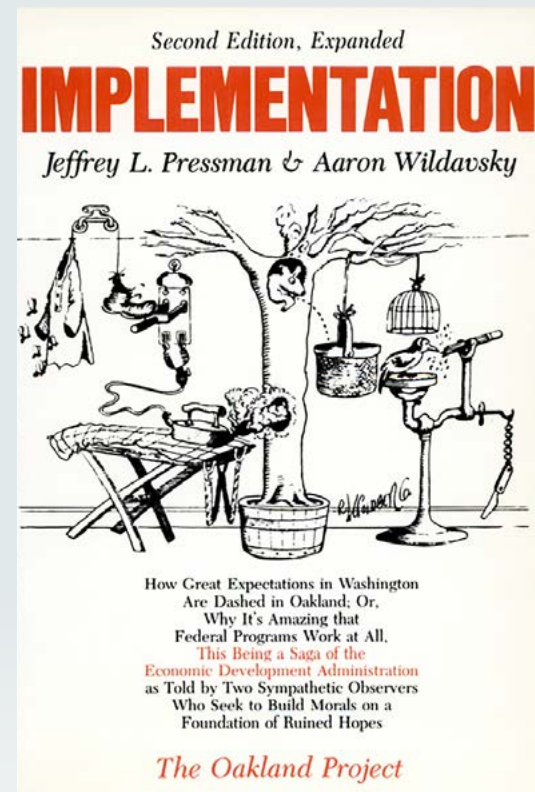


## 1. The Scientific Study of Government Action

Implementation research is concerned with such differences and investigates their causes. The main idea is that of the existence of different levels of action: state organs develop and enact laws, state, and municipal administrations as well as public and private service providers are commissioned to implement them, and all of this takes place in a societal reality that governments and authorities cannot simply control from above but of which they are a part of. All this can lead to considerable differences between what laws intend and what they really achieve.

Scientific implementation research focuses on such differences and is therefore an important factor for better realisation of political measures in societal reality. It poses important questions such as:

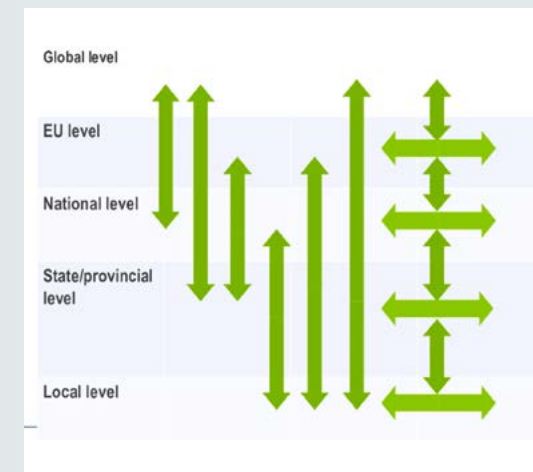
- How and to what extent are laws and regulations, on which government action is mostly based, actually translated into concrete facts and material benefits?
- What are the most effective strategies and how can day-to-day administrative work be improved? Are the authorities or agencies in charge actually able to fulfil the tasks assigned to them according to their resources?
- How do the explicit and implicit objectives of laws or regulations determine their actual implementation? Are these even adequate to the problem? Are realistic programme objectives formulated or can the problems addressed be solved at all?
- How do the traditional structures and practices of the responsible administrative units influence the success or failure of governmental policies programme and how can these be improved based on evidence?
- How can existing practices be reorganised and improved to meet new challenges?
- What are the best strategies to replace laws and regulations and the administrative practices associated with them with better solutions when they turn out to be ineffective or may never have been beneficial?



Pressman, Jeffrey L./Wildavsky, Aaron (1974): *Implementation: how great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland, or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all...* Berkeley.

Source: [https://books.google.com.vn/books?id=07ln-5ClecQC&printsec=frontcover&hl=de&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com.vn/books?id=07ln-5ClecQC&printsec=frontcover&hl=de&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Such a catalogue of questions points to a fundamental feature of political and administrative science since the 1960s: The persistent scepticism since then towards ambitious reform projects in view of their sometimes-serious implementation problems. In Germany, the starting point was the discovery that administrations were often simply unable to enact ambitious reforms. A similar disappointment resulted from the widespread failure of the socio-political project that US President Lyndon B. Johnson had launched as the War on Poverty. It was in this context that a study by Jeffrey Pressman and Aron Wildavsky, which has since become internationally authoritative, was published in 1974. It showed that policy realisation was by no means as simple as it initially seemed from the perspective of politicians in Washington, DC. In the local context of the social projects



Multi-level governance: possible horizontal and vertical interactions.

Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Multi-level-governance-possible-horizontal-and-vertical-interactions\\_fig2\\_282188892](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Multi-level-governance-possible-horizontal-and-vertical-interactions_fig2_282188892)

in Oakland, California, for example, which Pressman and Wildavsky investigated, it became clear that policy implementation could be a highly complex matter with many failures, even under the best conditions.

The quintessence of the numerous subsequent studies is by no means that the political and administrative levels should abandon attempts to tackle broader objectives altogether. However, a certain degree of realism would certainly be advisable. Implementation research can make a significant contribution to realistic objectives and the appropriate instruments for achieving them. The constructive aim here is to make government measures and the corresponding implementation more effective, more targeted, and also less cost-intensive for the benefit of all citizens.

## 2. Implementation, Implementation Research, and the Policy Cycle

The enormous importance of implementation and its study becomes even clearer when both are mapped onto the famous policy cycle. This (certainly ideal typical) model has, by and large, become established in international political and administrative science. The concept was first put up for discussion in 1956 by the American political scientist Harold Dwight Lasswell (1956). The model usually divides the political process into six or seven steps. If we follow a six-stage model, the policy cycle can be represented as follows:

- **Problem definition:** The life cycle of a governmental programme begins with the decision to deal with a problem in the first place. The way in which such decisions are made depends on the political system of the country in question.
- **Agenda setting:** The previously defined problem is placed on the political agenda, traditionally by political parties, for example via their congresses. However, agenda setting also takes place through pressure from the media. It is therefore a decisive factor because only certain actors can publicise a selected topic successfully.
- **Policy formulation:** If an issue is considered so important that, for example, a change in state legislation appears necessary, a decision-making process takes place. It involves the relevant actors, such as members of government, parliamentarians, representatives of social organisations and authorities and scientific experts. Depending on distribution of power, interests and institutional structures, a political decision is ultimately made, e.g. by passing a law to improve environmental protection.
- **Implementation:** A passed law, for example on poverty reduction, is adopted to existing legislation and then fed into various levels of the respective executive administrations. The new governmental measure is usually integrated into existing administrative practice. It is only through this implementation that a stage is reached in which an attempt is made to actually turn the concrete facts and material achievements that are part of the objectives of a governmental programme into reality.

- *Evaluation:* The real underlying problems become apparent during the application of a law or ordinance. For example, it may turn out that a law contains certain shortcomings that were not sufficiently foreseen by the legislator. Indications of such shortcomings can be found, again depending on the state constitution, in the self-evaluation of the respective enforcement administrations, in court judgements, in the reactions of programme addressees, in press coverage and, finally, in implementation research. The latter deals scientifically with the realization of policies and their possible enforcement deficiencies.
- *Re-definition or termination:* The final phase of the policy cycle is characterised by the decision whether to continue, change or abandon a particular measure. Such decisions are often related to the question of how governmental programmes are to be implemented: through administrative intervention, steering in the direction of desired conditions or through the allocation of services. Steering and performance administrations, are intended to implement (often temporary) measures such as environmental, economic, social, and educational policy. Such laws with incentives or benefits are therefore more frequently subject to change and are the favoured subject of implementation research.

Of course, political processes are not always organised in this way. However, such an ideal-typical representation helps recognise the important role of implementation in the entire policy cycle: The success or failure of a governmental programme depends very crucially on its realization.

This is because implementation includes all the steps and measures that are necessary from the formal adoption of a law through to its actual enactment: specification of the programme objectives, allocation of responsibilities, provision of budgets and personnel and finally decisions on individual cases, for example regarding social benefits. It is here that it is decided how successfully or not a legislative project can be realised, how it is subsequently evaluated and whether it should be continued at all. There are more reasons why the implementation phase is so crucial. Research has repeatedly shown that administrative action cannot be fully controlled by statutory regulations. The

realisation of a law or directive can be deeply altered or delayed by an administration. The question also arises as to whether certain policies can be imposed by administrative bodies at all: policies might fail due to the societal reality for which they are originally designed.

### 3. Successes and Failures in the Implementation of Policies

But why do certain programmes fail, and others succeed? Research since the 1970s initially identified three main sets of factors:

- The characteristics of the adopted laws and regulations themselves, i.e. which incentives or sanctions they contain, for example monetary benefits or fines. Are the chosen incentives or sanctions even sufficient?
- The characteristics of the addressees of the programmes, i.e. poor or sick people in the case of social benefits or certain types of companies in the economic sector. Do the respective policies adequately address their needs and capabilities?
- The characteristics of the so-called implementation system, i.e. those authorities that have been commissioned with the implementation of incentive or benefit programmes. Are the relevant authorities adequately equipped for their task?

An important result of the research on Western Europe and North America (and then also extended to other regions of the world) was that it is hardly possible to generalise about which projects are ultimately successful and which are not. The respective interplay of the factors of measures, addressees and administrations creates individual cases with very specific problem situations: this variability has become even more apparent in international comparisons, for example through factors such as different abilities of states to formulate reality-based policies, varying expectations of citizens towards the state and specific characteristics of national administrations. In addition, people have different levels of resistance to state control measures in certain areas, such as health and traffic policy. Financial incentive measures, such as tax relief, often only lead to so-called deadweight effects, i.e. to recipients seeking ways to take advantage of the benefits of the programmes without changing their behaviour.

Especially studies on implementation system have revealed a complex picture. On the one hand, if many administrative levels are involved in the implementation of a law, the result can be that the execution of a policy deviates considerably from the originally defined objectives. To put it simply, the programme goals (such as poverty reduction, environmental protection, road safety, administrative reform) are then *diluted*. On the other hand, there are the advantages of decentralised administrative structures, which can better adapt central government programmes to regional or local circumstances. This is a key argument in favour of the autonomy of regional or local administrations.

### 4. From Hierarchical Control to a Co-operative State

As already mentioned, implementation research began in countries such as the Federal Republic of Germany and the USA. The models used by a first generation of scientists were those of hierarchical control of societal life by the state. According to this idea, the state issued laws and regulations containing positive incentives and negative sanctions with which the behaviour of citizens could be monitored. Enforcement agencies were regarded as largely mere executive organs. Empirical research has considerably revised this picture. Below the political level in the narrower sense, a considerable independent existence of all institutions and individuals has become apparent. Here are just a few examples:

- Executing authorities often have little interest in publicising enforcement problems. They are held partly responsible for deficiencies in the execution of measures and are then exposed to conflicts and criticism. Therefore, even the information on the successes and failures of government measures is filtered.
- Administrative action is frequently not based on strict compliance with standards in the implementation of policies. Instead, executing authorities negotiate actively and systematically with the addressees. In the case of economic development programmes, for example, the responsible authorities calculate the resistance potential of the addressees, the respective political and economic relevance, and the administrative follow-up costs precisely in relation to a strict enforcement of standards.

- In addition, enforcement authorities are often involved in complex network relationships with their addressees, in Germany for example, in employment services and the corresponding support programmes between employment offices, companies and an extensive sector of further vocational education and training or qualification measures for the labour market for the unemployed.

In general, it turned out that the idealised separation of policy formulation and implementation can be very blurred in reality. There are numerous interactions between these levels and representatives of authorities, interest groups and other social organisations are often involved in policy formulation. These points of criticism have led implementation research to significantly revise its *legislative perspective* and switch from top-down to bottom-up concepts. Today, it no longer sees implementation as an attempt to control societies from above, but rather to develop measures that can be realised after analysing the societal practice of administration.

This also gave rise to ideas of a *co-operative administration or a co-operative state*. According to this view, there are opportunities for hierarchical control from above, but their potential is limited. Today, many policies are largely implemented within the framework of negotiation processes and are also partly determined by societal self-management and self-regulation.

On the one hand, this has led to a new paradigm, that of so-called regulatory policies. However, they do not proclaim any magic work, but rather draw conclusions from previous implementation research. Regulatory policies are not just *new wine* in old bottles, but rather summarise the results of 50 years of implementation research quite well and open up perspectives for better governance. Important recommendations for the entire policy cycle, from problem definition to re-formulation, are as follows:



<b>Above all, better policy formulation through</b>
Stakeholder consultation throughout the policy cycle
Analyse the impact before a decision is made
Ensure that regulations take risks into account Consideration of behavioural science findings
Better establishment of monitoring bodies from the outset
<b>The continued evaluation of existing regulations</b>
<b>Improving the implementation of regulations, particularly in economic incentives</b>
<b>Improvements to co-operation in cross-border tasks</b>

The internal administrative structures were also reformulated in the light of the sometimes-frustrating results of research in the sense of a New Public Management, which, however, was first introduced in administrative practice before it was systematised in theory. Important instruments are:

*Introduction of greater freedom of action for managers modelled on commercial enterprises, establishment of standards for the implementation of measures, systematic monitoring of the output of administrative action, awarding contracts to private service providers and creating competition between them, convergence with working methods from the private sector and, especially through everything, a reduction in costs.*

In this respect, the results of implementation research have certainly changed the view of governmental and administrative action considerably in recent years and have contributed to the emergence of new models for the development, implementation, and evaluation of state measures. However, it remains to be added that the co-operative state has a limit that results from the mandatory legality of state action. This must always be verifiable on a legal and statutory basis and must fulfil the principles of formal legality and substantive legitimacy.

5. Implementation Research in Vietnam

In the last 20 years in particular, Vietnam has become a field of investigation for implementation research, especially in the context of development co-operation. On the one hand, this reflects a state of research that has also been compiled in studies of countries comparable to Vietnam, in particular other countries of the ASEAN group. They have all travelled the complex path of building their own statehood after the end of the colonial era and sometimes still have deficits in this area. On the other hand, implementation research on Vietnam also reveals those programme priorities that have been set by the Vietnamese government itself, by international organisations or the research interests of foreign researchers.

In addition, the country has made a considerable leap forward since the 1980s; from one of the poorest countries in the world to another East and Southeast Asian tiger state. In a relatively short period of time, barely more than three decades, this has resulted not only in considerable social changes for the country, but also in completely different governance problems. The government's policies are therefore faced with the difficult task of keeping up with the enormous pace

of development, which at the same time provides a fascinating perspective for innovative research. The topic *implementation* in Vietnam is thus uniquely linked to the fundamental problem of rapid catch-up development and the associated challenges for the country's policies and administration. On the other hand, Vietnam has undergone a comprehensive de-regulation process since the Doi Moi reforms. For example, the state has largely withdrawn from direct planning control of the economy.

Implementation research on Vietnam is therefore an excellent indicator of what is or should be considered relevant for the country's development in the view of key players from international research and development cooperation. Looking at the international publications, there certain focal points, in particular

Health policy and public health (Health Strategy and Policy Institute 2011; Vuong Quan-Hoang 2022), climate protection (Schmidt-Thomé 2015), urban development (Shah/Ranghie 2012), poverty reduction and social policy for minorities (Klasen 2018, Wagstaff 2007), public administration and administrative reform (Haque/Wilson/Ko eds. 2023; Briesen/von Alemann/Lai Quoc Khanh eds. 2017).

This is not intended to be an exhaustive bibliography of studies, but it does indicate in our opinion some of the key areas. But there is another, perhaps more important perspective, and that is that of the Vietnamese themselves. What areas do Vietnamese researchers (and the public in the country) see as crucial regarding the implementation of governmental policies and their critical review?

This volume therefore endeavours to provide an overview of important sectors of Vietnamese policy development and their evaluation from an academic, Vietnamese perspective. This explicitly includes the views of researchers from the country itself as a focal point. For us, it is therefore once again a question of where Vietnam stands in the critical review of policies initiated by the government. This approach has significantly influenced the selection of topics that are outlined and presented for discussion here:

- Education: Luu Bich Ngoc
- Social policy in urban areas: Nguyen Van Chieu
- Policies to foster decent work: Nguyen Tuan Anh
- Women's policy: Duong Kim Anh
- Mitigation of climate change: Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang and Detlef Briesen.

Two further articles examine the changes in the basis for the implementation of political programmes, administrative reform (Vu Thi Anh Thu ) and the question of how these are received by the country's public (Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang). Another important topic is the question of whether and how Vietnam is responding to the challenges of its increasing international integration and the implementation of international agreements and standards Nguyen Van Dap and Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang. In a third section, as always, Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang provides important general information on the implementation of political programmes.

To sum up, we are particularly interested in:

- the characteristics and objectives of the adopted laws and regulations themselves,
- the addressees of the programmes and their presumed characteristics, and
- the characteristics of the respective authorities charged with implementing these policies.

Above all, however, we are attempting to determine the extent to which the legislative perspective has now been abandoned in Vietnam, i.e. whether attempts at top-down control have now given way to strategies for analysing social practice to develop measures that have a better chance of being implemented. In that regard, we think that Vietnam like other countries in the region is on the right track.

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# The Implementation of Fundamental and Comprehensive Renovation in Education and Training in Vietnam

● Luu Bich Ngoc

The comprehensive development of Vietnamese people and of high-quality human resources has become an urgent need. It is considered a ‘strategic breakthrough’ for achieving the national development goals of *Vietnam by 2030 and the vision for 2045*. Fundamental and comprehensive renovation in education and training is not only a top national policy but also a fundamental solution to realise development goals. Education and training should aim to develop individuals holistically, maximising personal potential to serve the country’s development. Renovation in education and training, including goals, contents, and education methods, over the past ten years has achieved significant success. General education has shifted strongly from equipping knowledge to developing the comprehensive competencies and qualities of learners. Vocational and higher education have been renovated to implement the *National Qualifications Framework*, aligning with the supply and demand in the labour market. The national education system has been improved towards an open education system, lifelong learning, and the establishment of a learning society to enhance the quality of human resources. However, in addition to these achievements, limitations in education renovation, training, and human resource development still exist. Though the views and policy orientations for a fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training in the long term have been affirmed, based on the existing limitations and goals to be achieved, the orientation and solutions for continued fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training need to be identified and realised.



Teenager with technique  
Source: Stock-Fotografie

Physical Education at Ton Duc Thang University  
Source: iStock.com/Khanchit Khirisutchalual





High Quality welding training at Quang Minh Vocational Technical and Tourism College

Source: Quang Minh Vocational Technical and Tourism College

## 1. Introduction

The Vietnamese national tradition, for thousands of years, has regarded learning as very important and should be given the highest priority. Families, even if poor, try to save and cut down on living expenses, including spending on clothing and improving living conditions, to afford to send their children to school. Vietnamese culture continues to uphold the tradition of

*Respecting teachers and valuing morality, One word makes the teacher, half a word also makes the teacher, and I dare you to achieve success without a teacher,*

which all stem from the belief in the importance of learning, honing skills, and acquiring knowledge. In the past, learning was mostly confined to the classroom. Gradually, learning has been understood more broadly with the perspective of *learning everywhere, learning at all times*. When it turned to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of science and technology, as well as socio-economic progress, have made learning today a matter of *lifelong learning*.

In Vietnam, education development is also considered a top national policy to enhance people's intellectual standards, develop human resources, and foster talents. This is expressed in the 2013 Constitution (Clause 1, Article 61). Additionally, according to the provisions of Article 4 of the 2019 Education Law, it is clearly stated:

"Article 4. Education Development

1. The development of education is the top national policy.
2. Education development must be aligned with the needs of economic and social development, scientific and technological advancement, and strengthening national defence and security. It must implement

standardisation, modernisation, and socialisation; ensure a balanced structure of disciplines, levels, and human resources suitable for different regions; expand scales to ensure quality and efficiency; and combine training with utilisation.

3. Development of an open education system and establishment of a learning society to create opportunities for everyone to access education, learn at all levels, in all forms, and engage in lifelong learning."

In addition to the consideration of education as the top national policy, education development must be aligned with the needs of economic and social development, scientific and technological advancement, and strengthening national defence and security; it must implement standardisation, modernisation, and socialisation; and ensure a balanced structure of disciplines, levels, and human resources suitable for different regions. The outcome of education is a new generation of people who will serve the future development of the country in all cultural, political, and socio-economic aspects.

## 2. Orientation and Policies for Education Development

*High-quality human resources have become an urgent need and a breakthrough for the goal of national development by 2030, with a vision for 2045*

The national socio-economic development strategy for the 2021–2030 period has determined:

"Arousing the aspiration for national development, strongly promoting the values of Vietnamese culture and people and the power of the era, mobilising all

resources, and developing rapidly and sustainably based on science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation, striving to become a developing country with modern industry and high middle income by 2030, and a developed country with high income by 2045." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021)

For Vietnam currently, to implement a strategy for rapid and sustainable development in the context of the *Fourth Industrial Revolution* and extensive international integration, it is essential to focus on developing human resources, especially high-quality ones. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when determining that Vietnam would pursue the path of industrialisation and modernisation, the Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (in 2001) identified human resource development as one of the three *breakthroughs* in the national development strategy, alongside institutional improvement and infrastructure development (Communist Party of Vietnam 2001).

At the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (in 2011), it was emphasised:

"Developing and enhancing the quality of human resources, especially high-quality human resources, are a strategic breakthrough and a decisive factor in promoting the development and application of science and technology, restructuring the economy, transforming the growth model, and the most important competitive advantage, ensuring rapid, effective, and sustainable development." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2011)

The 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (in 2016) further affirmed the important role of high-quality human resources through the viewpoint:

"Industrialisation and modernisation in the upcoming period will continue to promote the implementation of the model of industrialisation and modernisation in the context of developing a socialist-oriented market economy and international integration, linked with knowledge-based economic development, using science, technology, knowledge, and high-quality human resources as the main driving force."

Based on this, the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress set forth the direction and tasks:

"Build a strategy for developing human resources for the country, for each industry and sector, with synchronised solutions, focusing on training and retraining human resources both in schools and the production and business process, emphasising on the enhancement of professionalism and practical skills." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2016)

Building on the spirit of previous congresses, the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (in 2021) continued to identify

"Developing human resources, especially high-quality human resources; prioritising the development of human resources for leadership, management, and key sectors based on enhancing and creating a strong, comprehensive, and fundamental transformation in the quality of education and training linked with mechanisms for recruitment, utilisation, and treatment of talented individuals, promoting research, application transfer, and the strong development of science and technology, and innovation" as one of the three strategic breakthroughs. The Congress also set the requirement to "Train individuals with ethics, discipline, order, a sense of civic and social responsibility; possessing life skills, work skills, foreign languages, information technology, digital technology, creative thinking, and international integration (global citizens)." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021)

*Education and training need to aim at the comprehensive development of individuals, fully harnessing personal potential to serve the country's development*

To create a high-quality workforce to serve national development, the national education and training system needs fundamental and comprehensive renovation. On April 11, 2013, the Central Executive Committee of the Party issued Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW on *fundamental and comprehensive renovation of Education and Training to meet the needs of industrialisation and modernisation in the context of a socialist-oriented market economy and international integration* (Central Executive Committee of the Party 2013). From this point onward, Vietnamese education began a phase of *transformation and transition*.

Previously, the Education Law of 2005 set the educational goal as

"Training Vietnamese individuals to develop comprehensively, with ethics, knowledge, health, aesthetics, and profession; loyal to the ideals of national independence and socialism; forming and nurturing the character, qualities, and competences of citizens to meet the requirements of building and protecting the Fatherland." (National Assembly 2005)

However, with the *Education Law of 2019*, the educational goals were *renewed* to align with modern educational philosophy and the objective of developing human resources for the country's development. This goal is

"education aimed at the comprehensive development of Vietnamese individuals, with ethics, knowledge, culture, health, aesthetics, and professionalism;



possessing qualities, competences, and civic awareness; having patriotism, national spirit, loyalty to the ideals of national independence and socialism; promoting the potential and creativity of each individual; enhancing intellectual standards, developing human resources, nurturing talents, and meeting the requirements of building, protecting the Fatherland and international integration.” (National Assembly 2019)

The 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (2021) identified that

“Education and training need to build Vietnamese individuals to be comprehensively developed, healthy, capable, skilled, and possess a high sense of responsibility towards themselves, their families, and the Fatherland; while also developing a team of leading experts and scientists; focusing on technical personnel, digital human resources, technology management personnel, and business management; as well as social management personnel and those who organise life and care for people.” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021)

This demonstrates that Vietnam’s educational thinking and philosophy have been completely renewed compared to the past. Education aims to foster the comprehensive development of individuals, enhance personal strengths, and attract intellectuals to serve the national development.

### 3. Implementing Fundamental and Comprehensive Renovation in Education and Training to Create a High-Quality Workforce and a New Generation of Vietnamese Individuals

Over the past ten years, Vietnam’s national education system has undergone significant fundamental renovation, from goals to content and teaching methods. Comprehensive renovation in education is evident at all levels, from preschool to general education, lifelong learning, vocational education, and higher education. Changes include the establishment and development of teaching quality, mechanisms for mobilising educational resources, school management methods, and collaboration among families, schools, and the community in education and training. The focus of educational goals has shifted from solely imparting knowledge (teaching literacy) to emphasising the development of competencies and qualities that shape human character (teaching individuals). Education promotes historical and cultural traditions while adapting to modern social life (digital citizens, global citizens, etc.).

*Renovating general education: a strong shift from equipping learners with knowledge to comprehensively developing learners’ competencies and qualities*

Looking at the achievements of educational renovation, the first thing to mention is the fundamental and comprehensive renovation of the General Education Programme (GEP). For the first time in the history of national education, the new GEP, covering grades one to twelfth, was developed and completed in 2018 (Circular 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT dated December 25, 2018). It includes a comprehensive programme (the framework of the GEP) and 27 subjects and educational activities. The programme is implemented nationwide and is expected to be fully completed across all general education levels by the 2024–2025 school year. This programme represents a strong shift in education from primarily imparting knowledge to comprehensively developing learners’ competencies and qualities. While previous GEPs addressed the question, *What do students know after completing the programme?* the new GEP focuses on answering, *What can students do after completing the programme?*

The new GEP defines the goal of forming and developing key qualities in students: *patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility*. In the new GEP, learners’ qualities are developed through two main pathways:

- first, through the knowledge content of certain subjects, for example, the spirit of patriotism can be fostered through the content of History, Civil and Civics, National Defence and Security, Experiential Activities, and certain aspects of Literature, Geography, Biology, etc. Most of these subjects also cultivate students’ compassion, tolerance, respect for different cultures, and appreciation of diversity);
- second, through educational methods (for example, qualities such as diligence, honesty, and responsibility are gradually formed and developed through daily learning efforts under the guidance and training of teachers. Patriotism and compassion can only be sustainably developed through practical activities).

The new GEP outlines the mission of forming and developing the following core competencies in students:

- General competencies that are contributed to and developed by all subjects and educational activities: autonomy and self-learning competency, communication and collaboration competency, problem-solving and creativity competency.



Young Businesspeople

Source: iStock.com/SunnyVMD

- Specialised competencies that are primarily formed and developed through certain subjects and educational activities: language competency, mathematical competency, scientific competency, technological competency, information technology competency, aesthetic competency, and physical competency. In addition to forming and developing core competencies, the new GEP also contributes to identifying and nurturing students’ special talents. The new GEP forms and develops students’ competencies through three approaches: differentiated instruction, integrated teaching, and active learning through learners’ active engagement (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

The educational content is designed to reduce the volume of knowledge, enhance practical skills, and harmonise moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education. The programme emphasises high integration in lower grades and gradual differentiation in upper grades. It addresses the overlap between subjects and ensures connectivity between classes and educational levels and among subject programmes. It organises education to promote the initiative and potential of each student through diverse methods and forms of educational activities. The assessment methods have gradually shifted from knowledge testing to evaluating students’ competencies and qualities (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

The primary and secondary school levels constitute the basic education programme, while high school levels are implemented according to differentiated education and career orientation suitable for students’ competencies. Foreign languages and information technology are included in the GEP starting from grade three. The teaching methods have fundamentally changed, with the curriculum framework and output standards for student’s competencies being the *mandate*, while textbooks serve as reference materials for teaching and learning. The implementation of *one curriculum, multiple textbooks* has created an open space for teaching and learning, fostering creativity among both teachers and students (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

*Renovating vocational education and higher education: implementation of the National Qualifications Framework to gradually meet the supply and demand of the labour market*

The goals of vocational education are specifically stipulated in the Vocational Education Law of 2014 (Article 4) to train a workforce directly for production, business, and services, with professional competencies corresponding to their level of training; possessing ethics and health; having professional responsibility; being capable of creativity and adapting to the work environment in an international context; ensuring



increased productivity and labour quality; and providing opportunities for learners, after completing their courses, to find employment or pursue higher education (National Assembly 2014).

The training objectives and output standards for each level and field of vocational education are determined in accordance with the regulations of the National Qualifications Framework of Vietnam and the minimum required knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility of learners upon graduating from each level of vocational education (output standards). This creates an open direction for vocational education institutions to autonomously announce output standards suitable for the competencies and conditions of regions and localities, according to each school's training industry and profession.

The training programmes have been adjusted according to output standards, enhancing connections with businesses, diversifying training methods, retraining, and upgrading workers' vocational skills to meet the demands of career transitions and job changes for employees in enterprises, as well as to adapt to the changes in production and business in the digital age and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Prime Minister issued Decision No. 1446/QĐ-TTg on August 30, 2021).

Teaching and learning methods are gradually being renovated to promote students' initiative, active participation, independence, and increased time for skill practice and teamwork, with input from businesses and employers. The organisation of training has gradually shifted to a credit accumulation system according to the Vocational Education Law (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

Innovation in higher education and the objectives of higher education are specifically stipulated in the Law on Higher Education 2012 and amended in 2018 (Article 5), aiming to train human resources, improve people's intellectual standards, and foster talent, conducting scientific research and technology to produce new knowledge and products that serve the socio-economic development needs, ensure national defence and security, and international integration; training students with political and ethical qualities, practical skills, research competencies, and the application of science and technology commensurate with their level of education; ensuring health; fostering creativity and professional responsibility; adapting to the working environment; and cultivating a sense of service to the community (National Assembly 2012; National Assembly 2018).

Training programme standards for various fields are developed for each level and according to specific sectors or groups of industries, serving as a basis for monitoring and evaluating training quality. Higher education institutions actively develop and diversify training programmes across all different fields. The development of training programmes in higher education institutions involves participation from managers and employers. All training programmes, including objectives and output standards, are made public for candidates, students, and society as required.

Higher education institutions have actively and proactively renewed content and teaching methods with a competency-based approach, enhancing applied skills and practical training, emphasising professional ethics and social understanding. They focus more on developing foreign language skills, soft skills, and extracurricular activities that help students cultivate talents and creativity. There is an increased focus on practical experience, linking training with businesses. The goal is to educate students to become dynamic, creative citizens with personalities, practical skills, professional ethics, and social awareness, gradually approaching the world's advanced scientific and technological standards.

The application of information technology in teaching and learning has been strengthened, allowing learners to access new learning methods to continually update and innovate their knowledge, skills, and competencies. Training programmes are organised in various learning formats, combining in-person and online modes, as well as integrating research activities and internships at businesses. Many educational institutions (Vietnam National University-Hanoi, Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Can Tho University, Hanoi University of Civil Engineering, etc.), have developed training programmes that align with international standards. As of the 2016–2017 academic year, there were 35 advanced programmes at 23 training institutions; 16 high-quality engineering programmes meeting French Republic standards at four training institutions; and 56 other high-quality programmes at various institutions. Additionally, universities have over 500 international collaborative training programmes with universities worldwide. They have also implemented significant digital transformation in higher education (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

*Perfecting the national education system towards an open education system, lifelong learning, and building a learning society to enhance the quality of human resources*



*Education Every child has the right to go to school and learn.*

Source: <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/education>

After ten years of implementing Resolution 29-NQ/TW, the framework of the education system has demonstrated openness, flexibility, and connectivity among different educational levels and training methods, ensuring compatibility with international education classifications. This creates opportunities for lifelong learning and the development of a learning society. The national education system has been established in the 2019 Education Law to ensure long-term stability. Additionally, flexible and adaptable education and training methods, including formal schooling, continuing education through distance learning, and on-the-job training, and an open learning environment have been created that fosters lifelong learning and contributes to building a learning society (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

In 2016, the Prime Minister issued a new framework for the national education system (Decision No. 1981/QĐ-TTg dated October 18, 2016) and the Vietnamese national qualifications framework (Decision No. 1982/QĐ-TTg dated October 18, 2016), serving as the foundation for fundamentally and comprehensively renovating education and training. The framework for

the national education system and the qualification framework are also largely compatible with international education classification systems (UNESCO's Tables of International Standard Classification of Education 2011), ensuring comparability across levels, creating diverse learning pathways, and providing opportunities for all learners who have the ability and desire to engage in lifelong learning, thus contributing to the development of a learning society (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

The general education system is established for twelve years, consisting of three levels of education: primary education for five years (from grade one to grade five), secondary education for four years (from grade six to grade nine), and high school education (from grade ten to grade twelfth). It is tailored to the characteristics of each age group, aligned with national needs and international trends (163 out of 206 countries (79.1 per cent) have a 12-year general education system) in general education, ensuring compatibility with global education classification systems and providing study durations comparable to other countries. The current general education system ensures continuity and



coherence in educational goals and content across different levels. Additionally, implementing pilot models for new schools (such as high-quality schools, smart schools, advanced schools, bilingual schools, etc.) has provided students with a modern educational environment that employs advanced teaching methods, integrating learning with experience and exploration, fostering skills development while nurturing personality growth. The various types of general education institutions effectively meet the diverse needs of different groups and have implemented integrated teaching at the secondary level and differentiated approaches at the high school level, facilitating student pathways (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

The current *National Qualifications Framework of Vietnam* consists of eight levels (primary level one, two, three, intermediate level, college, university, master's, doctorate) that align with the structure of the national education system and existing laws. It is compatible with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, the European Qualifications Framework, and about 70 per cent of qualification frameworks worldwide. This structure supports cooperation in education and the recognition of qualifications and competencies of the workforce in the context of Vietnam's deep and broad international integration (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

The network of lifelong education facilities has been strengthened and developed to meet the learning needs of all citizens. Community learning centres at the district and commune levels have been gradually reinforced and equipped to operate effectively, successfully implementing literacy programmes and addressing the educational needs of local communities. Language and IT training centres, offering diverse programmes, have contributed to promoting foreign language learning and life skills among learners and residents. Short-term training sessions and scientific knowledge transfer initiatives are organised to meet the educational demands of the population. The construction of a learning society is based on simultaneous development, ensuring integration between formal education and lifelong learning and providing optimal conditions to meet the educational needs of the community (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

#### 4. Orientation to Continue the Fundamental and Comprehensive Renovation in Education and Training in the New Period

*Some existing limitations in the renovation of education, training, and the development of high-quality human resources*

Although the quality of general education has shown many positive changes, it remains uneven among localities, between rural and urban areas, across different education levels, and between public and private schools. It has not yet fully met the requirements for comprehensive education and the country's need for high-quality human resource training. The goal of implementing nine years of compulsory education since 2020 has not been achieved. Vocational education and student streaming after secondary and high school graduation have not been highly effective. Most provinces/cities have more than 70 per cent of students graduating from secondary schools, continuing to high schools, with some regions even exceeding 80 per cent. The rate of secondary school graduates entering vocational or intermediate professional training is low, and a significant proportion of these graduates join the labour market without training, affecting the quality and structure of the labour force's education. The rate of youth aged 18–24 achieving upper secondary education and equivalent levels is only 68.3 per cent (below the target of 80 per cent). Implementing the 2018 General Education Programme has encountered many difficulties and uncertainties (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

Despite the achievements made, the quality and level of training in vocational education and higher education still face limitations. They only meet the average human resource needs for the country's development and lack the quality required for high-level human resources. This does not sufficiently bridge the gap between advanced countries in the region and the world. The WIPO Global Innovation Index (GII) report features two main indicators related to higher education: the Tertiary Education (TE) index and the Research & Development (R&D) index. In 2023, the TE index is ranked 89/132, trailing behind four countries in the region (*Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines*), while the R&D index is ranked 44/132, trailing behind three countries in the region (*Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia*). The structure of occupations, training levels, and quality of education have not kept pace with the development

requirements of the economy and the needs of the new generation of learners. The shortage of high-quality, highly skilled human resources has become a significant bottleneck in attracting investment and developing high-tech industries (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023).

As of 2022, the country has approximately 4.28 million individuals with a college degree or higher, including nearly 25,000 PhDs (of which 12,500 are engaged in science and technology, with 41 per cent working in universities and colleges), and about 110,000 master degree holders (with 35 per cent working in universities and colleges) (General Statistics Office 2023). In 2022, the proportion of master degree programmes accounted for approximately 5.0 per cent, while the proportion for doctoral programmes was below 0.6 per cent. In comparison, these proportions in Malaysia are 10.9 per cent and 7.0 per cent, in Singapore 9.5 per cent and 2.2 per cent, and the averages for middle-income countries are 10.7 per cent and 1.3 per cent, while OECD countries average 22.0 per cent and 4.0 per cent. Overall, across all levels of education in all fields, the number of postgraduate students in STEM fields in Vietnam accounts for less than 1.1 per cent, only about one-third of that in South Korea, one-fourth of that in Israel, one-ninth compared to Finland, and one-eleventh compared to Germany. If we only consider doctoral students in STEM fields, Vietnam's rate is approximately 0.14 per cent, which is less than one-tenth of that in South Korea, and Israel, and the average for EU countries, and less than one-sixteenth of that in Finland and Germany (Ministry of Education and Training 2023).

Vietnam's socio-economic development over the past ten years has been strong, but overall, it has not been commensurate with its potential and advantages. The country is still facing many difficulties and challenges. The scale, productivity, quality, efficiency, and competitiveness of the economy are not high. State budget investments prioritise economic development tasks due to the country's ongoing development process. The living standards of a portion of the population remain difficult, significantly impacting the attention and determination to invest in education and the effective implementation of the tasks and solutions set forth by Resolution 29-NQ/TW. The downsizing of the teaching staff occurs amidst the natural population growth across the country and the influx of people to urban areas, major cities, and industrial zones, which increases pressure on the education and training system. Meanwhile, fundamentally and comprehensively renovating education and training

is a large and complex task with no precedent in our country; applying global experiences faces difficulties due to significant differences in culture, politics, and socio-economic conditions in Vietnam.

*Solutions to Continue Implementing Fundamental and Comprehensive Renovation in Education and Training.*

To achieve the development goals by 2030, it is essential to continue making breakthroughs in fundamental and comprehensive renovation in education and training, truly considering education and training as the top national policy, a cause of the Vietnamese Party and State, and the entire population; investing in education is investing in development, prioritised in economic and social development programmes and plans. In the coming period, there is a need for strong and synchronous renovation of the fundamental elements of education to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education and training. Some proposed policy solutions include:

- After the renovation of the General Education Programme and the training renovation at college and higher education, it is necessary to renovate the preschool education programme. The content, programme, and methods of preschool education should be renewed with a competency-based approach, ensuring the right to care and education for all children, focusing on the goals of quality, equity, and inclusion in the protection, care, and nurturing of young children, laying a solid foundation for quality human resources in the future.
- Continue to implement the General Education Programme 2018 effectively. Further, the curriculum should be renovated to shift the focus of education from primarily imparting knowledge to developing students' comprehensive abilities and qualities. Innovate the content and develop continuing education programmes to meet the citizen's diverse learning needs.
- Innovate and develop vocational education towards being open, flexible, modern, effective, and integrated, focusing on both quantity and quality of training. Invest in developing some vocational education institutions and fields to meet regional and global standards, aiming to catch up with, keep pace with, and exceed in certain areas. Maximise the potential and qualities of learners; promote entrepreneurship and innovation; tightly connect vocational education with labour market needs, employment, social welfare, and sustainable, inclusive development.

- Enhance the quality of higher education to create a significant transformation in training quality, scientific research, innovation, and technology transfer to meet the demand for high-quality human resources. Innovate management, programmes, and training methods; establish and issue standards for higher education institutions and training programmes in line with international integration. Prioritise investment in key training sectors essential for the country's industrialisation and modernisation, particularly in the digital economy, green economy, circular economy, and the learning needs of the population, contributing to enhancing competitiveness in the process of international economic integration.
- Focus on innovating and enhancing the quality of political education, ideological education, ethics, and lifestyle for students; promote revolutionary ideals, patriotism, national pride, awareness of legal compliance, community responsibility, and aspirations for contribution among students. This contributes to forming the value system of Vietnamese people in the era of integration and development. Strengthen collaboration between families, schools, and society in educating students.
- Strengthen physical education, labour skills training, life skills, communication skills, and self-learning abilities for students; help students connect practical application of the knowledge and skills acquired during their studies to solve real-life problems. Focus on creating a safe, happy, healthy, and friendly school environment for children, students, and learners to develop holistically in both character and ability.
- Strongly shift the methods of education and training from merely providing knowledge and skills in subjects to developing students' abilities, enhancing their self-learning and creativity skills, and diversifying types of training and learning formats. Promote the application of information technology and modern technologies in teaching and learning and develop models for digital schools and universities. Improve the quality of foreign language education, especially English, at all educational levels and training stages. Renovate the assessment of learners towards developing qualities and competencies; strengthen quality assurance and educational accreditation according to national and international standards.
- Build a sufficient, high-quality, and appropriately structured workforce of educators and educational managers. Renovate the models and methods of training and fostering educators towards developing competencies and professional ethics that meet renovation requirements. Innovate mechanisms and policies for recruitment, management, utilisation, and recognition of talent within the education sector.
- Continue to innovate state management of education, training, and school governance towards standardisation, modernisation, democratisation, and international integration. Strengthen decentralisation and delegation of authority in state education management, ensuring systemic, interconnected, and unified management from central to local levels. Enhance the delegation of autonomy linked to increased accountability to society, learners, and management agencies for educational institutions. Implement planning for the network of educational institutions to meet people's learning needs, the demand for human resource development, the socio-economic development needs of localities and regions, and national sustainable development needs. Strengthen inspection, monitoring, and supervision of the institutionalisation of the Communist Party's policies on education and training and the implementation of legal policies in education and training.

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Modern apartment blocks in Ho Chi Minh City  
Source: iStock.com/SamuelBrownNG

# The Implementation of Social Policies in Urban Areas in Vietnam

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## 1. Introduction

Vietnam is one of the countries with a rapid urbanisation rate. Urbanisation plays an important role in the success of Vietnam, with the proportion of the population living in towns and cities increasing from less than 20 per cent in 1990 to over 37.55 per cent in 2022 (General Statistics Office 2023). To manage social development in general and urban areas in particular, Vietnam has acknowledged and implemented many solutions to promote comprehensive and sustainable developments. In recent years, many social policies have been implemented to improve the quality of life, resulting in many benefits to the urban population and the population in rural and mountainous areas. However, as urbanisation continues accelerating in Vietnam, urban residents face many social welfare challenges such as poverty, unemployment, diseases, healthcare quality, education, employment services, etc. Therefore, the effective implementation of social policies is an essential solution for sustainable urban development. The major cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City still face significant challenges in housing shortages, overcrowding in healthcare and education, and environmental pollution of the social policy systems. The reasons for this situation include the excessively rapid pace of urbanisation, the limited internal capacity and absorptive ability of urban areas, and inadequacies in government and local authorities' mechanisms, policies, and urban planning. This has led to patchy urban development, overburdened social infrastructure, traffic, environment, healthcare, education, etc. As a result, urban residents do not fully enjoy the benefits of urbanisation, and the quality of life is not high.

## 2. Urbanisation Challenges and the Role of Social Policies in Sustainable Urban Development in Vietnam

### *Urbanisation and social challenges in Vietnam*

The nearly 40-year process of renovation in Vietnam is a remarkable success story. Vietnam has transformed from one of the poorest countries in the world to a lower-middle-income country through comprehensive renovation and a rapid shift from an agricultural economy to industrialisation and systematically promoting urbanisation. By 2023, out of a total population of 100.3 million, the urban area would have about 38.2 million people, accounting for 38.1 per cent, while rural and mountainous areas comprised 61.9 per cent, with about 62.1 million people.

The urbanisation rate in Vietnam continues to grow rapidly due to mechanical population migration from rural to urban areas and the expansion of urban administrative boundaries. Compared to 2022, the urban population rate increased by 0.6 percentage points in 2023 and by one percentage point compared to 2021 (General Statistics Office 2023). The influx of people to major cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and surrounding areas, with significantly higher migration rates than the national average, increases pressure on employment, housing, and social welfare services. The migration rate to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is 2.7 times the national average and 5.3 times higher than rural areas (United Nations Population Fund in Vietnam 2021). The migration pressure on particular urban areas is the highest, with nearly 200 out of every 1,000 people living in certain urban areas being migrants, 2.7 times the national average (Dang Thi Anh Tuyet/Vu Thai Hanh 2023).





Housing in Hanoi's Old Quarter

Source: iStock.com/NicolasMcComber

In Vietnam, as in many countries worldwide, the migration process to urban areas is often linked to the country's socio-economic development, with migrant labour being the leading force in migrations, possibly bringing their families along. The common point of migrations is the positive motivation to promote socio-economic development, contributing to the redistribution of population, shifting the economic labour structure, solving employment, reducing poverty, and ensuring sustainable development, with migrant labour playing an important role (Mac Van Tien 2023). Although migrant labour plays an important role in the country's socio-economic development, they remain the most vulnerable group and have difficulty accessing social welfare services such as labour, employment, poverty reduction, social insurance, social protection, and essential social services such as healthcare, education, housing, and clean water (Truong Thi Ly 2022; Nghiem Thi Thuy 2023; Dang Thi Anh Tuyet/Vu Thai Hanh 2023; Pham Thi Kim Xuyen/Nguyen Thi Minh Thuy 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, people across the country were affected, especially migrant groups in urban areas. Migrant workers in urban areas, whether in formal or informal sectors, were vulnerable during this period.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing weaknesses of domestic migrant workers (International Labour Organisation 2020). Additionally, the negative impacts of global climate change are also exacerbating challenges in urban areas and directly affecting people, including vulnerable migrant groups.

#### *The role of social policies in sustainable urban development in Vietnam*

With the primary goal and content of

"Being a policy that cares for people, prioritising people as the centre, the subject, the goal, the motivation, and the resource for the sustainable development of the country." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021)

Social policies play an essential role in ensuring social justice and social welfare for urban residents.

Regarding direction, based on the resolutions passed at the Party Congresses (mainly the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> Congresses), the Communist Party of Vietnam has identified the orientation and tasks for developing social policies in each period. In 2012, at the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, Resolution No. 15-NQ/TW on some social policy issues for the

2012–2020 period was issued. The resolution focused on two basic and essential policy groups within the social policy system: preferential policies for those who have contributed to the country and social welfare policies. This resolution shows the Party's concern in implementing social policies to achieve fast and sustainable development. In 2023, at the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of the 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, Resolution No. 42-NQ/TW of the 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee on *Continuing to Innovate and Improve the Quality of Social Policy to Meet the Requirements of National Construction and Defence in the New Period* was issued. The resolution set a general goal for 2030:

"Building a social policy system towards sustainability, progress, and fairness, continuously improving people's material and spiritual life and contributing to the cause of national construction and defence. Completing a diverse, multi-layered, comprehensive, modern, inclusive, and sustainable social welfare policy; creating opportunities for people, especially the poor, people in difficult circumstances, and people living in areas with tough socio-economic conditions, to access essential social services, especially healthcare, education, housing, and information; developing a flexible, efficient labour market integrated internationally associated with sustainable employment; improving the quality of social development management associated with ensuring human rights and citizen's rights." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021)

From 2012 to now, the National Assembly, the Vietnamese Government, and various ministries and sectors have actively institutionalised the Communist Party's guidelines and perspectives on social policies. The system of preferential policies for those who have contributed to the country and social welfare has been gradually completed.

The 2013 Constitution specifically affirmed:

"Citizens have the right to social security" (Article 34) and "The Government and society honour, reward, and implement preferential policies for those who have contributed to the country." "The State creates equal opportunities for citizens to enjoy social welfare, develop the social security system, and have policies to assist the elderly, people with disability, the poor, and other disadvantaged people." (Article 59)

Other issues such as employment, healthcare, education, and housing are mentioned in several articles of the Constitution, such as

"Citizens have the right and obligation to study" (Article 39). "Everyone has the right to health protection, care, and equal use of medical services and the obligation to comply with regulations on disease prevention, examination, and treatment" (Article 38). "The State encourages and creates conditions for organisations and individuals to create jobs for workers" (Article 57). "The State has a policy for housing development to create conditions for everyone to have accommodation" (Article 59).

To concretise the provisions of the 2013 Constitution in specific areas of social policy, a system of related legal documents has been issued and implemented, specifically:

- The legal system on labour, employment, and occupational safety has been significantly improved since 2012, with many new points suitable for practical conditions. In addition to the revised Labour Code in 2019, the Employment Law in 2013, the Occupational Safety and Health Law in 2015, the National Target Programme on Employment and Vocational Training for the 2011–2015 period, and the National Target Programme on Vocational Education – Employment and Occupational Safety for the 2016–2020 period, there are about 60 legal documents including 14 Government decrees, 13 Prime Minister decisions, and 30 circulars and inter-ministerial circulars.
- In poverty reduction, the policy system has been improved, national target programmes have been effectively implemented, and mechanisms and policies have been innovated. Since 2012, more than 100 legal documents on poverty reduction have been issued, and two national target programmes for sustainable poverty reduction have been implemented, actively supporting poor households. Poverty reduction policies have been adjusted to prioritise poor, near-poor, and newly out-of-poverty households, expanding support for health insurance, preferential credit loans, production support, and creating livelihood for these groups. Poverty reduction is closely linked to livelihood creation, employment, vocational training, and labour export.
- In social insurance and unemployment insurance, the policy and legal system have been completed and are suitable for a socialist-oriented market economy. Besides the Social Insurance Law of 2014, Resolution No. 28-NQ/TW on reforming social insurance policies, and the Employment Law



of 2013, there are over 70 other legal documents issued, including one National Assembly resolution, four Central Committee resolutions, 23 Government decrees, four Prime Minister decisions, and 25 circulars and inter-ministerial circulars.

- In social assistance, the legal system of social assistance has been improved, expanding the range of beneficiaries with various appropriate support forms, raising the allowance level, and gradually approaching international trends. Social assistance policies cover almost all groups, meet basic needs, and create a widespread, intertwined social safety net. There are currently over ten laws and codes; seven ordinances and more than 30 Government decrees and decisions; over 40 circulars and inter-ministerial circulars, and many other directive documents directly related to social assistance, especially the Elderly Law, the Disability Law, and the Children Law.
- Regarding ensuring minimum education, over 70 legal documents have been issued, including three laws, one Central Committee resolution, one Party Secretariat conclusion, one Government resolution, 17 Government decrees, 21 Prime Minister decisions, and 25 circulars and inter-ministerial circulars. Policies supporting education for students from poor households, social protection beneficiaries, ethnic minorities, and areas with tough socio-economic conditions have improved equity in education, with great social significance, playing an important role in raising people's intellectual standards, training human resources, and reducing poverty.
- Regarding ensuring minimum healthcare, more than 50 legal documents have been issued since 2012, including one law, three Central Committee resolutions, one Government resolution, six Government decrees, 15 Prime Minister decisions, and 24 circulars and inter-ministerial circulars. The legal and policy system for health insurance has been improved with the aim of universal health insurance.
- Regarding ensuring minimum housing, a system of housing policies and support programmes for vulnerable groups has been developed and implemented. Since 2012, 18 legal documents have been issued, including one law, one Government resolution, four Government decrees, one directive, six Prime Minister decisions, and five circulars and inter-ministerial circulars.

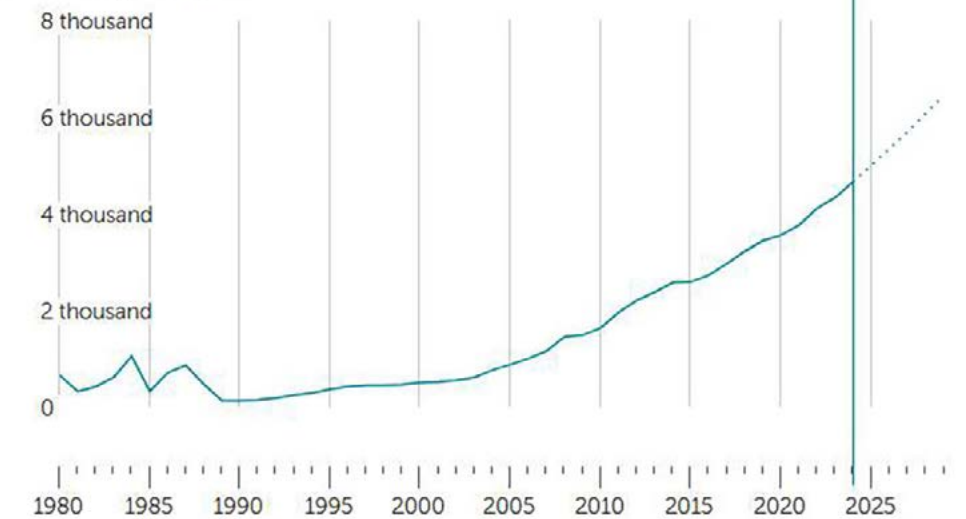
- Regarding ensuring clean water, since 2012, eight legal documents have been issued, including one Government decree, one directive, three Prime Minister decisions, and three circulars. The 2014 Environmental Protection Law also includes several provisions on urban environmental protection, residential areas, households, and waste and wastewater management.
- Regarding ensuring information access, all citizens are equal and not discriminated against in exercising the right to access information, and the state facilitates access to information for people with disabilities, those living in border areas, islands, mountainous areas, and areas with difficult socio-economic conditions. In addition to the 2016 Law on Access to Information, 14 legal documents were issued between 2012 and 2019, including eight Prime Minister decisions, six circulars, and inter-ministerial circulars.

Overall, the legal system for social policy has created a favourable legal framework for agencies, organisations, families, and individuals to actively participate in ensuring social welfare for urban residents, fostering social consensus, and enabling citizens to build their lives, reaffirming their roles in the community and society.

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a severe health crisis but also a significant crisis regarding social security issues (Nguyen Thi Thanh Tung/Kim Hong Linh/Le Minh Cong 2022). The COVID-19 outbreak affected employment and income for migrants in urban areas. In response, several policy documents were issued to support the affected population, such as Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP and Decision No. 15/2020/QĐ-TTg on expanding support beneficiaries due to COVID-19 impacts. However, the implementation of these policies did not achieve the desired results (Nghiem Thi Thuy 2023). Therefore, to better address social security policies for citizens, on November 24, 2021, the Prime Minister issued the Plan to implement Conclusion No. 92-KL/TW dated November 5, 2020, of the Politburo on continuing to implement the Resolution of the 5th Conference of the 11th Central Committee on Some Social Policy Issues (Decision No. 1983/QĐ-TTg). One of the tasks of this plan is to develop a social service system to meet the needs of migrants and vulnerable groups in society. Regarding the government's goals in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 and 2021, the National Assembly and the Government issued a series of policies to promptly support people in difficulty, ensuring nobody is left behind (Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs 2022).

#### TREND (1980-2029)

U.S. dollars per capita



Vietnam, GDP per capita, current prices U.S. dollars per capita

Source: International Monetary Fund

<https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/VNM?zoom=VNM&highlight=VNM>

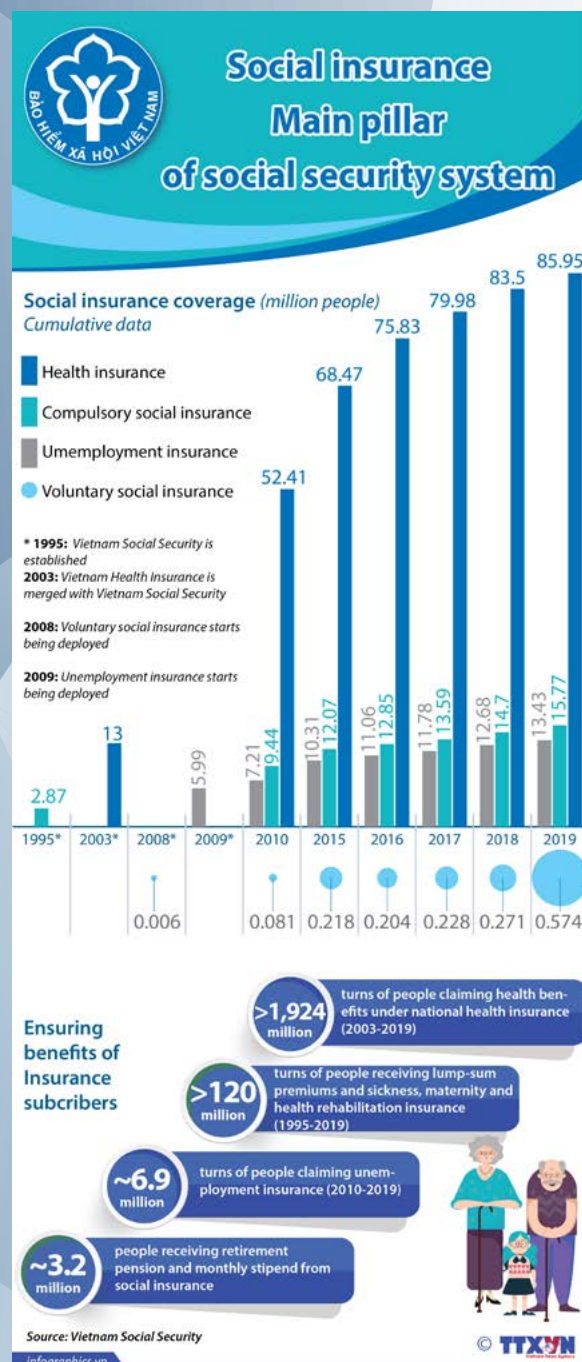
It can be seen that social policies play an important role in sustainable urban development in Vietnam. Through full and effective implementation, social policies have created opportunities for urban residents to develop equitably, have access to shared resources, participate in, contribute to, and benefit from society, establishing a strong material, intellectual, and cultural foundation for future generations, increasingly meeting the material and spiritual needs of all social strata, and helping urban residents live comfortably and happily (Duong Duc Tam 2019).

### 3. Results of the Implementation of Social Policies in Urban Areas in Vietnam

Since 2012, the implementation of social policies has significantly contributed to promoting socio-economic development and addressing urbanisation-related social issues in Vietnam. There has been considerable investment and expansion in urban technical and social infrastructure, enhancing service quality and urban living standards. Unemployment rates and the proportion of poor households have decreased steadily; the development of certain urban areas has spurred socio-economic growth in rural regions. The urban unemployment rate for the working-age population

has shown a decreasing trend, declining from 4.3 per cent in 2010 to 3.1 per cent in 2019. Urban poverty rates at 3 per cent are nearly three times lower than those in rural areas. The national average life expectancy has increased from 73.3 years in 2015 to 73.7 years in 2020, with urbanised areas demonstrating higher average life expectancies (Electronic Information Portal of the Ministry of Construction 2022).

Per capita income is a crucial indicator that reflects the success of improving living standards through economic development, both locally and globally. In Vietnam, from 2012 to 2022, per capita income has more than doubled. According to the Household Living Standards Survey Report (General Statistics Office 2022), the average monthly per capita income rose from 2.0 million in 2012 to 4.67 million Vietnamese dong in 2022. Specifically, urban per capita income increased from 2.98 million to 5.94 million Vietnamese dong, nearly doubling. Thus, increased income has significantly improved the lives of residents, especially those in rural areas. Notably, the 2022 per capita income exceeds the 4.29 million Vietnamese dong per month reported in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, with the top 20 per cent income earners averaging 10.23 million Vietnamese dong per person per month. This reflects a robust economic recovery, driving overall social growth and income increases.



Social Insurance in Vietnam

Source: Vietnam Social Security

<https://en.infographics.vn/social-insurance-main-pillar-of-social-security-system/15264.vna>

Regarding benefits for the contributors to the revolution, Vietnam has effectively supported their livelihoods and their families in urban areas, ensuring that no revolutionary families remain in poverty and guaranteeing them a standard of living equal to or higher than the community average. Outstanding issues in processing backlogged files and confirming revolutionary status have been resolved comprehensively to ensure no contributions to the national liberation and those who fulfil international duties are overlooked. By the end of 2019, substantial progress had been made in providing housing support to economically disadvantaged revolutionary families in urban areas nationwide (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs 2022).

Regarding employment in urban areas, the overall unemployment rate has consistently remained below 4.0 per cent over the past decade. However, due to the impact of COVID-19, the urban unemployment rate in 2021 was 4.42 per cent. The average monthly per capita income in urban areas in 2022 reached nearly 5.95 million Vietnamese dong (an increase of 10.3 per cent compared to 2021), which is 1.54 times higher than the average income in rural areas at 3.86 million Vietnamese dong (an increase of 10.8 per cent compared to 2021) (General Statistics Office 2022).

Nationally, the percentage of labour force members participating in social insurance has increased annually, reaching 32.6 per cent in 2020 and 36 per cent in 2021. The participation rate in unemployment insurance has also increased annually, reaching 26.8 per cent in 2020 and 30 per cent in 2021 (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs 2022). As of 2021, in Hanoi, mandatory social insurance coverage encompassed 37.59 per cent of the total working-age population, with voluntary social insurance accounting for 0.81 per cent and unemployment insurance participation reaching 36 per cent (Vietnam Social Insurance 2021). By the end of 2023, in Ho Chi Minh City, 54.4 per cent of the labour force participated in social insurance, and 52.61 per cent were covered by unemployment insurance (Vietnam Social Insurance 2024). However, voluntary social insurance policies have not yet significantly attracted migrant workers, particularly female migrants (Mac Van Tien 2023).

In urban areas, the number of individuals with exceptionally difficult circumstances receiving regular social assistance has increased annually. The number of beneficiaries receiving monthly cash allowances has surpassed the target set in Resolution 15-NQ/TW.

Emergency social assistance policies have covered vulnerable groups, ensuring timely support for people facing risks or natural disasters (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs 2022).

Regarding the minimum education standards, universal education has been completed ahead of schedule from preschools to secondary schools. In 2022, the enrolment rates for primary, secondary and high schools at the appropriate ages were 95.8 per cent, 90.6 per cent, and 77.2 per cent, respectively. Over the past decade, from 2012 to 2022, these enrolment rates have shown an increasing trend, particularly in high school enrolment (increasing from 59.4 per cent in 2012 to 77.2 per cent in 2022; General Statistics Office 2022). Many migrants relocate to urban areas so their children can have opportunities for better studies and access to better and high-quality educational environments regarding facilities and teaching staff. Migrant workers in informal areas incur additional costs for their children's education in public schools catering to students with local household registrations (Mac Van Tien 2023).

In 2021, nationwide, 88.8 million people participated in health insurance, accounting for 91 per cent of the population. The rate of full immunisation coverage for infants under one-year-old consistently reached 96–98 per cent, exceeding the resolution target (above 90 per cent). The prevalence rate of underweight children under five years old decreased from 16.2 per cent in 2012 to 12.5 per cent in 2020. The incidence rate of tuberculosis also declined from 215 per 100,000 people in 2012 to 182 per 100,000 people in 2018. Vietnam is not among the top 20 countries worldwide with the highest tuberculosis prevalence rates (Ministry of Health 2019). Per capita, healthcare expenditure in urban areas, with medical examination and treatment, was higher than in rural areas (2.8 million compared to 2.3 million Vietnamese dong – a difference of nearly 500,000 Vietnamese dong per person with medical care; General Statistics Office 2022).

Regarding ensuring minimum housing in urban areas, housing conditions for the poor and low-income individuals have gradually improved. The social housing development programme for low-income earners in urban areas has completed investments in constructing 149 projects, providing approximately 90,000 apartments with a total area of about 4,518,000 square meters (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs 2022). Social housing construction partly meets the needs of migrant workers (Nghiem Thi Thuy 2023).

An advantage of Vietnam's social policy system in recent years is its effective support for the poor, vulnerable groups, and various other urban residents under better-managed risks. Social policies have progressively expanded in scope, target groups, and impact levels. These support policies increasingly receive individual, and community support based on solidarity, sharing, and mutual assistance principles (Nghiem Thi Thuy 2023).

#### 4. Evaluation of the Results of Implementing Social Policies in Urban Areas in Vietnam

##### Achievements and reasons

The awareness of the political system and the people regarding the special and increasingly profound role of social policies in urban areas within the framework of socialist-oriented market economy development has become more comprehensive. Social policies in urban areas continue to be refined in a progressive and equitable direction.

Policies benefiting revolutionary contributors in urban areas receive special attention and are among the best social policies implemented. The social policies issued and implemented in urban areas during this period have met the essential needs of various population groups, ensuring social equity. Simultaneously, they encourage citizens to actively participate in constructing, implementing, and benefiting from policies, leveraging the community's internal strength and individual efforts to escape poverty and enrich themselves, thereby contributing to the community, nation, and country.

Despite limited state budget conditions, the government has concentrated significant resources to implement social policies in urban areas. Depending on socio-economic conditions, some localities have supplemented additional resources to expand the coverage of beneficiaries and increase benefit levels.

##### Limitations and causes

Firstly, the implementation of social policies in urban areas lacks comprehensiveness and connectivity in supporting beneficiaries and does not cover all target groups. There is insufficient mutual support and coordination among key policy pillars in the implementation organisation; the disparity in living standards between regions and groups remains significant.





The 2021 National Cultural Conference implements the Resolution of the 13th National Congress of the Party.

Source: <https://quochoi.vn/UserControls/Publishing/News/BinhLuan/pFormPrint.aspx?UrlListProcess=/content/tintuc/lists/news&ItemID=71136>

Secondly, the process of organising and implementing social policies in urban areas is not synchronised, lacking uniformity among localities.

Thirdly, the quality of social services is still limited. The system providing social services and social care has many weaknesses and fails to meet the requirements for professional innovation.

Fourthly, the resources for implementing social policies in urban areas are limited and lack initiative. These policies are often tied to government budget guarantees, so their implementation depends heavily on economic growth and the government budget-balancing capability. They have not yet created a mechanism to fully encourage and attract widespread social participation and encourage policy beneficiaries to lift themselves out of poverty. There is still a lack of linkage between the resources of social policies, social security, social welfare, and social resources to flexibly, timely, and effectively meet the needs of people's lives and ensure social security.

The reasons for these limitations are as follows:

Firstly, the awareness of some party committees, governments, political organisations, socio-political organisations, and professional social organisations regarding the role and position of social policies in urban areas is not comprehensive, appropriate to reality, and does not keep pace with international development and integration trends. The leadership and direction

of some party committees and governments have not received adequate attention.

Secondly, the system of policies and laws is still not synchronised. The quality is not high, and the organisation of implementing social policies in urban areas still faces many limitations, is not timely, and lacks consistency and flexibility. Sanctions for handling violations are not strong enough.

Thirdly, the government management methods in social sectors are slow to innovate, not modern, and do not ensure connectivity, flexibility, and timeliness. Some decentralised and empowered areas do not create conditions for localities to proactively handle policies. There are not many breakthroughs in research and basic statistics in management and social development, and the application of technology is slow. There is a lack of long-term forecasts.

Fourthly, the organisational machinery and human resources are not synchronised and do not meet increasing demands in the new situation. Resources for implementing social policies in urban areas are effective in some places and fields, but they are limited, while the policy sector is wide, covering many target groups. There is still a lack of linkage between budget and social resources to respond flexibly, in a timely manner, and effectively. There is no flexible coordination mechanism to adapt to significant fluctuations such as pandemics and widespread natural disasters.

## 5. Recommendations to Enhance the Effectiveness of Implementing Social Policies in Urban Areas in Vietnam

To realise the vision by 2045, it is determined that the comprehensive, sustainable, progressive, and equitable development of social policies ensures social welfare and well-being for people, contributing to the country's development goals and comprehensive human development of the Vietnamese people. Vietnam aims to be among the countries with a high Human Development Index (HDI) worldwide (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021). The implementation of social policies in urban areas should focus on the following priority solutions:

*Continuously raising awareness of the role and importance of social policies in ensuring and promoting sustainable urban development.*

Enhancing propaganda and education to increase awareness of the important role, perspectives, goals, tasks, and solutions of social policies in urban areas in the new phase. Building and enforcing social policies in urban areas towards sustainability based on human rights access, motivating contributions to national development.

*Enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of state management in social policies in urban areas.*

Continuously improving the legal system for social policies in general and in urban areas in particular, ensuring unity, coherence, feasibility, and meeting the requirements of the urbanisation process. Modernising state management in implementing social policies in urban areas; promoting digital transformation, digitising management process, and organising policy implementation. Step by step, implementing social security numbers for urban residents, improving the national database system and specialised databases related to social policies, ensuring connectivity, safety, and security of general information and personal data.

Innovating the mechanism for mobilising resources to implement social policies in urban areas effectively; besides state resources playing a leading role, it is necessary to mobilise social resources and international cooperation rationally; and enhance socialisation and public-private partnerships in implementing social policies in urban areas.

*Improving and developing the labour market, enhancing the quality of human resources, and creating sustainable employment for workers.*

Effectively implementing population policies and managing urban population growth in a reasonable structure and distribution. Innovating and improving the social policy framework in urban areas to adapt to the aging population.

Making breakthroughs in providing essential social services in urban areas, such as healthcare, education, clean water, environmental sanitation, information, and legal services. Developing a labour market towards flexibility, integration, efficiency, and synchronisation with the socialist-oriented market economy. Modernising and digitalising market information forecasting, supply-demand connection, labour resource management, and building labour and employment databases to improve the effectiveness of urban employment solutions. Promoting structural labour adjustments suitable for economic structures, gradually reducing the labour force in informal areas, and increasing sustainable employment opportunities for people within and after the labour age. Expanding social policy credit to provide loan support for job creation and livelihoods for people, especially the poor and those in difficult circumstances. Promoting the implementation of public employment policies, especially in challenging economic conditions, for unemployed workers.

*Building and improving the social security system in urban areas.*

Developing a comprehensive social security system that shares information among the state, society, people, and between population groups, ensuring sustainability and social equity. Focusing on developing a flexible, diversified, multi-tiered, modern social insurance system that is integrated internationally and covers the entire workforce. Enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of implementing social insurance policies, unemployment insurance, and health insurance. Improving the social assistance system to address people's material and spiritual well-being, helping them to promptly overcome difficulties caused by economic and social crises, natural disasters, pandemics, and other risks. Continuously raising the standard level of social assistance in urban areas to ensure the minimum living standard and the national social safety net.

Continuously implementing comprehensive and sustainable urban poverty reduction solutions in a multidimensional and inclusive manner, ensuring a minimum living standard and access to basic social services. Supporting production development, diversifying livelihoods, gradually increasing income,

stabilising long-term living conditions for poor households, near-poor households, and people in remote areas and ethnic minority regions, and mountainous areas.

Strengthening cooperation and mobilising resources to implement social policies in urban areas.

Enhancing the efficiency of mobilising and using investment resources for implementing urban social policies and funding such as budgets, socialisation, and technical support activities from foreign countries, organisations, and international organisations for social policies. Promoting the transfer of science and technology towards sustainable employment, increasing labour productivity, ensuring social welfare, and providing social assistance.

6. Conclusion

Using synthetic and secondary data analysis methods, this article first highlights the challenges of urbanisation and the role of social policies in sustainable urban development in Vietnam. It assesses the implementation outcomes of social policies in Vietnamese cities, identifies difficulties in this process, and proposes some appropriate recommendations.

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## Goal 8 : DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Decent Work and Economic Growth  
Source: iStock.com/Gam1983

## Fostering Decent Work in Vietnam

● Nguyen Tuan Anh

### 1. Introduction

The Political Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Party emphasised:

“Developing the labour market, aiming for sustainable employment. Establishing principles for the use and management of labour in accordance with market development, building harmonious, stable, and progressive labour relations, etc. Shifting labour structures in line with the economic structure, increasing the proportion of labour in the formal sector, and focusing on addressing employment for informal sector employees, especially agricultural employees transitioning to new occupations.” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, 149–150)

Overall, this is an important direction to strengthen decent work in Vietnam.

Regarding decent work, the General Director of the International Labour Organisation affirmed that it is one of the top priorities in global consultations for the 2030 Agenda. Decent work is a goal and a driving force for sustainable development. Decent work fosters strong and inclusive economic growth. It provides income for individuals and their families. Decent work for all helps reduce inequality and enhances resilience (International Labour Organisation n. y. b).

Within the scope of this article, several specific aspects of decent work in Vietnam will be discussed. Firstly, the article will address key characteristics of decent work. Based on this, the reality of several important aspects of decent work in Vietnam will be examined and drawn from updated data. Specifically, the article will focus on three key aspects of decent work in Vietnam today: employment opportunities, labour productivity, and employers’ income.

### 2. Decent Work and the National Framework for Decent Work

According to the International Labour Organisation, decent work is a concept that reflects people’s aspirations regarding their employment, including opportunities for productive work that provides fair income, safe working conditions, and social protection for all. It also involves better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for individuals to express concerns, organise, and participate in decisions affecting their lives, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men (International Labour Organisation n. y. a).

According to this concept, decent work has important characteristics:

- First, it provides employees with the opportunity to work. This means ensuring employment opportunities for all employees who need jobs.
- Second, the work must be productive. Thus, a key point is that decent work must be productive.
- Third, it ensures fair and adequate income. From a specific perspective, having jobs and productive work is the basis for fair and adequate income.
- Fourth, it guarantees workplace safety and social protection for everyone. This is a crucial condition for employees to be protected, receive healthcare, and participate in and benefit from social and occupational accident insurance.
- Fifth, decent work should offer better prospects for employees’ personal development and social integration.
- Sixth, there should be freedom for everyone to express their concerns and freedom for everyone to organise and participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Seventh, everyone should have equal opportunities, and all women and men should be treated equitably.





Decent Work Country Programme Viet Nam 2022-2026:  
The future of work we create

Source: <https://beavccivietnam.com.vn/en/detail.asp?id=19260>

Vietnam Chamber of Commerce & Industry

One of the key foundations for achieving the goal of decent work in Vietnam is the National Framework for Decent Work in Vietnam. On March 28, 2023, the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the representative organisations of employees and employers, and the International Labour Organisation on the National Framework for Decent Work in Vietnam for 2022–2026* was signed. This is the fourth National Framework for Decent Work in Vietnam. This framework is a crucial basis for “Addressing the challenges in ensuring effective employment opportunities and fair income for all women and men in Vietnam.” (International Labour Organisation 2023)

The National Framework for Decent Work in Vietnam for 2022–2026 has three national priorities.

Firstly, “By 2026, Vietnamese people, particularly those at risk of being left behind, will contribute to and fairly benefit from a sustainable, inclusive economic transformation that responds to gender through innovation, entrepreneurship, increased productivity, competitiveness, and decent work.” (International Labour Organisation et al. 2023, V)

Secondly, “By 2026, Vietnamese people, particularly those at risk of being left behind, will benefit from social services and social protection systems that are inclusive, gender-responsive, sensitive to people with disability, equitable, affordable, and of high quality, to reduce multidimensional poverty in a sustainable and comprehensive way and empower individuals to reach

their full potential.” (International Labour Organisation et al. 2023, V)

Thirdly, “By 2026, people in Vietnam, especially those at risk of being left behind, will benefit from and contribute to a more equitable, safe, and inclusive society, underpinned by improved governance, more responsive institutions, strengthened law rules, enhanced protection and respect for human rights, gender equality, and the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination, in line with Vietnam’s international commitments.” (International Labour Organisation et al. 2023, V)

Overall, various aspects contribute to the concept of decent work. Within the scope of this article, based on updated data from different sources, the following sections will focus on several aspects related to decent work. Specifically, these sections will address employment opportunities, labour productivity, and employees’ income. These are key aspects of decent work.

### 3. Employment Opportunities

In the assessment of world employment trends, in its publication *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024*, the International Labour Organisation assessed that the global macroeconomic environment deteriorated significantly in 2023. Notably, growth in advanced economies decreased, large emerging economies experienced a deceleration, and rising inflation negatively impacted industry, investment, and global trade. Despite this, “employment growth has remained resilient, and the unemployment rate continues to decrease” (International Labour Organisation 2024, 11). Despite the economic downturn, the labour market remains positive. Specifically, the International Labour Organisation states that

“Due to strong employment growth, both the unemployment rate and the employment gap have fallen before the pandemic. The global unemployment rate in 2023 was 5.1 per cent, slightly improving over 2022.” (International Labour Organisation 2024, 11)

According to statistics, the country’s labour force was approximately 52.5 million people in the second quarter of 2024 (General Statistics Office 2024). Compared to the fourth quarter of 2020, when the labour force was 52.1 million people, the labour force increased by 0.4 million (General Statistics Office 2024). The number of underemployed individuals in the working-age population in the second quarter of

2024 was 948,000. Thus, the underemployment rate in the working-age population for the second quarter of 2024 was 2.06 per cent (General Statistics Office 2024). The unemployment rate in the working-age population for the second quarter of 2024 was 2.29 per cent, with 2.71 per cent in urban areas and 2.01 per cent in rural areas (General Statistics Office 2024). Compared to the global unemployment rate of 5.1 per cent as previously mentioned (International Labour Organisation 2024, 11), the overall unemployment rate in Vietnam in 2024 was less than half of the global rate. This indicates that employment opportunities for the working-age population in Vietnam are higher than those of workers worldwide. This is a positive aspect reflecting decent work in Vietnam.

However, it is notable that the unemployment rate among Vietnamese youth was high. The General Statistics Office reported that the unemployment rate of youth aged 15 to 24 in the second quarter of 2024 was 8.01 per cent, with the urban youth unemployment rate at 10.19 and the rural youth unemployment rate at 6.86 per cent (General Statistics Office 2024). Compared to the overall unemployment rate, the youth unemployment rate was consistently higher and three times higher (General Statistics Office 2024). In the second quarter of 2024, approximately 1.3 million young people aged 15 to 24 nationwide were unemployed and not engaged in education or training. This number accounted for 10.2 per cent of the total youth population, with 11.3 per cent of rural youth unemployed and not participating in education or training and 8.5 per cent of those in urban areas (General Statistics Office 2024).

Compared to the youth unemployment rate in Asia and the Pacific, the rate in Vietnam is still lower. The average youth unemployment rate in Asia and the Pacific in 2023 was estimated to be around 14.4 per cent. Notably, the youth unemployment rate is particularly high in urban areas of China, with a rate of 20.4 per cent in April 2023 (International Labour Organisation 2024, 48).

Thus, although the youth unemployment rate in Vietnam is lower than in Asia and the Pacific, it remains high. This is a very concerning reality for the process of achieving the goal of developing decent work in Vietnam

Another noteworthy point related to decent work is the large proportion of employees in the informal sector in Vietnam. According to data from the General Statistics Office, the total number of informal sector employees in the second quarter of 2024 was 33.5

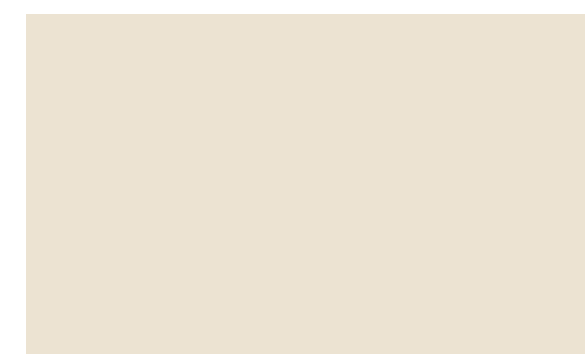
million, accounting for 65.2 per cent of all employed individuals (General Statistics Office 2024). Compared to the first quarter of 2024, the number of informal sector employees increased by 271,700 in the second quarter (General Statistics Office 2024). Considering the first six months of 2024, the national rate of informal employment was 65 per cent. Specifically, the rate of employees employed in the informal sector was 49.7 per cent in urban areas and was 74.5 per cent in rural areas (General Statistics Office, 2024).

Thus, the proportion of employees in the informal sector is very high. This is a significant point to consider regarding decent work, as employees in the informal sector often face challenges in achieving decent work compared to those in the formal sector. Informal sector employees are generally more vulnerable, as their job quality is typically lower, working hours are often longer, and their employment can be intermittent. Additionally, informal sector employees have less access to labour protections and social security than those in the formal sector. Consequently, informal sector employees are more susceptible to economic shocks (International Labour Organisation et al. 2023, 14). Therefore, the high rate of informal sector employment in Vietnam is another critical issue in the process of achieving the goal of decent work in Vietnam.



Increasing Income

Source: iStock.com/Gwengoat





4. Labour Productivity

Another important issue concerning decent work in Vietnam is labour productivity. In the current context, with the rapid development of technology and international integration, many new types of jobs will emerge, requiring new skills related to automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, and big data. However, many of Vietnam’s workforce are still not adequately prepared to enhance their labour skills to contribute to the economy (International Labour Organisation et al. 2023, 22).

The General Statistics Office reported that in the second quarter of 2024, the proportion of the workforce with formal training acquiring certificates or qualifications was 28.1 per cent. Considering the first six months of 2024, the rate of employees with qualifications or certificates from training was 28 per cent (General Statistics Office 2024). Thus, less than one-third of the workforce has received formal training with qualifications or certificates. This is a significant factor affecting labour productivity.

In reality, Vietnam’s labour productivity is low compared to many countries in the region. According to the General Statistics Office, in terms of PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) for 2017, Vietnam’s labour productivity in 2020 was

“Only 11.3 per cent of Singapore’s labour productivity; 23 per cent of South Korea’s; 24.4 per cent of Japan’s; 33.1 per cent of Malaysia’s; 59.1 per cent of Thailand’s; 60.3 per cent of China’s; 77 per cent of Indonesia’s; and 86.5 per cent of the Philippines’ productivity. In Southeast Asia, Vietnam’s labour productivity is only higher than that of Cambodia (2.4 times), Myanmar (1.6 times), and Laos (1.2 times).” (General Statistics Office 2023, 32)

In 2022, Vietnam’s labour productivity, measured in US dollars 2017 based on PPP (Purchasing Power Parity), was 2,400 US dollars, which was only 11.4 per cent of Singapore’s productivity, 35.4 per cent of Malaysia’s, and 79 per cent of Indonesia’s (Chinhphu.vn 2024). Experts have calculated that productivity in Vietnam’s private sector is very low. Private enterprises create about 59 per cent of employment in the business sector, but their productivity was only 3.6 per cent of that in state-owned enterprises and 28.5 per cent of that in foreign direct investment (FDI) enterprises (Chinhphu.vn 2024). The report on the implementation of the socio-economic development plan and state

budget for 2023, and the situation in the early months of 2024, presented at the opening session of the 7th National Assembly, XVth Legislature, indicated that the rate of productivity growth has not met expectations (Government 2024a).

Hence, one of the issues facing the process of ensuring decent work in particular, and socio-economic development in general in Vietnam, is increasing labour productivity. Experts suggest that various solutions need to be implemented to boost labour productivity. Some important proposed measures include: improving the business environment, increasing access to resources, reducing administrative costs, enhancing the efficiency of state management to foster faster business growth, expanding business scale, promoting the manufacturing sector, supporting the formation of large enterprises, encouraging industry clusters through the concentration of related industries in industrial zones and economic zones, promoting labour shift from low productivity sectors to high productivity sectors, from the informal to the formal sector, and implementing effective wage policies (Government 2024a). In summary, in reality, labour productivity in Vietnam remains low. It is therefore necessary to implement various measures to increase labour productivity to contribute to developing decent work.

5. Employees’ Income

In addition to employment opportunities and labour productivity, ensuring fair income for employees is a key aspect of decent work. Guaranteeing income for employees is a crucial requirement not only for decent work but also for social development. According to Resolution No. 142/2024/QH15 from the National Assembly at its 7th session of the XV Legislature, from July 1, 2024, the basic salary will be adjusted from 1.8 million Vietnamese dong per month to 2.34 million per month (a 30 per cent increase), and pensions and social insurance benefits will be increased by 15 per cent (National Assembly 2024). On June 30, 2024, the government also issued Decree No. 73/2024/ND-CP, which stipulates the basic salary and bonus regime for officials, civil servants, public employees, and armed forces (Government 2024b). This important policy has significantly increased the income for a large portion of the workforce.

Data from the General Statistics Office shows that the average income of employees in the second quarter of 2024 was 7.5 million Vietnamese dong per month. This income level is a decrease of 137,000 Vietnamese dong



Increasing labour productivity through automatisisation  
Source: iStock.com/invincible\_bulldog

compared to the first quarter of 2024 but an increase of 490,000 compared to the same period in 2023 (General Statistics Office 2024). Comparing the average income of male and female employees in the second quarter of 2024, male employees’ average income was 8.5 million Vietnamese dong per month, while female employees’ average income was 6.3 million per month (General Statistics Office 2024).

Comparing the average income of employees in urban and rural areas in the second quarter of 2024, the average income for employees in urban areas was 9 million Vietnamese dong per month, while for those in rural areas, it was 6.5 million per month. Therefore, the average monthly income of employees in urban areas was 1.39 times higher than that in rural areas (General Statistics Office 2024).

For the first six months of 2024, the average monthly income of wage-earning employees was 8.4 million Vietnamese dong. Within this, male employees’ average income was 8.9 million Vietnamese dong per month, while female employees’ average income was 7.8 million per month (General Statistics Office 2024).

In reality, recent data shows that the average salary in Vietnam was only one-seventh of the average salary in the Asia-Pacific region (International Labour Organisation et al. 2023, 14). According to a 2018 survey on living standards and employees’ income in Vietnam, 43.7 per cent of employees earned enough to cover their living expenses, 26.5 per cent lived frugally, and 12.5 per cent did not earn enough and had to work extra hours to make ends meet (International Labour Organisation et al. 2023, 14–15).

Overall, the data indicates that employees’ income in Vietnam remains low. It is important to note that when employees’ income is insufficient, they may struggle to focus on their jobs. Moreover, insufficient income also affects the daily lives of employees and their families, impacting their happiness, life satisfaction, as well as their healthcare and the renewal of their work capacity. This, in turn, affects better prospects for personal development and social integration which are key aspects of decent work.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this article focuses on four main topics as follows.

- First, the article addresses the nature of decent work and its key aspects. From a certain perspective, decent work is a goal to be pursued and a crucial driving force for sustainable development. Developing decent work contributes to sustainable economic growth and improves individual development prospects.
- Second, the article focuses on analysing employment opportunities for employees in Vietnam. Overall, the chances of finding employment for working-age people in Vietnam are higher than the global average. However, the unemployment rate among Vietnamese young people remains high, and the proportion of employees in the formal sector is still significant. These realities have a significant impact on the process of developing decent work in Vietnam.
- Third, the article discusses labour productivity. Updated data shows that Vietnam’s labour productivity is low compared to many countries in the region. Recently, the government has also assessed that the increase in labour productivity has not met expectations. This reality indicates the need for various measures to enhance labour productivity, aiming to improve decent work and develop the economy and society more broadly.
- Fourth, the article discusses employees’ incomes. Recently, the new policy on base salary and bonuses for officials, civil servants, public employees, and armed forces has improved the incomes of a significant portion of the workforce. However, the average salary in Vietnam remains low compared to the average in Asia-Pacific. Therefore, increasing employees’ income is a crucial factor in enhancing decent work in Vietnam.

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Female Street Vendors and Gender Role Performance: Research and Policy Recommendations

● Kim Anh Duong

Labour and employment are important issues for each country, determining the country sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations sets out 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), many of which are related to labour and employment such as SDG1 on poverty eradication, SDG2 on hunger eradication, SDG5 on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, SDG8 on economic growth and decent work, SDG12 on sustainable production and consumption. There are different studies on labour and employment in general, but few studies on women in the informal labour market, including street vendors, especially studies that explore the labour and employment issues of street vendors from a gender perspective.



Street Vendor in Hanoi  
Source: iStock.com

1. Introduction

According to the General Statistics Office and the International Labour Organization (2022), Vietnam has a high rate of working-age population participating in the labour market – up to 75 per cent. However, the rate of participation in the informal market is still high. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of informal labour in 2021 reached 68.5 per cent, an increase of 0.3 per cent compared to 2020, reversing the downward trend of the informal labour rate in many previous years. Previously, the General Statistics Office (2019) also pointed out that, if calculated by working hours, the whole country had nearly 700,000 unemployed workers, of which up to 77.9 per cent currently live in rural areas. Rural areas provide an important source of labour for the economy, however, the trained labour force in this area is much lower than in urban areas (14.8 compared to 38.7 per cent). This also explains why rural workers participate in informal work more. Informal work makes an important contribution to job creation and income generation for workers, in the context of our country being a low-middle income country.

Women face many barriers in the informal labour market, including barriers such as gender discrimination and risks of gender-based violence. Social norms, values, and expectations of what women should do and what men should do cause women to do a lot of unpaid care work, affecting women's full development; or limitations in accessing and enjoying welfare and security regimes, limitations in accessing and controlling labour and production resources. Gender differences in income between women and men in the labour market are clearly evident. According to the General Statistics Office and the International Labour Organization (2022), women working in informal jobs have lower average incomes than men and are more vulnerable than men with a sharp decrease in income.



After two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the average income of informal female workers has decreased by more than 100,000 Vietnamese dong/month, while the decrease for men is only 26,000 Vietnamese dong/month. The results of the General Statistics Office's labour and employment survey (2021) show that although the number of employed people decreased during the pandemic, the number of women with informal jobs increased, increasing more strongly than men. This is explained by the fact that women do not have as many options when participating in the labour market as men, they are forced to accept unstable and vulnerable jobs to have an income to support themselves, their children and families.

In Vietnam, the image of female street vendors has become familiar in every province and city across the country, especially in urban areas. Street vending is a livelihood activity of a segment of the population, aiming to meet the needs of goods and services in a flexible, convenient, affordable, timesaving, easy, convenient, and bargainable manner. It can be said that the image of female street vendors has become a beautiful image, the image of a woman who is hard-working, diligent in the family, and still maintains that hard-working beauty when stepping out into the community. Compared to other research topics, research on female street vendors is limited in quantity and depth. The voices, thoughts and aspirations of female street vendors are therefore still vague and not widely known. Meanwhile, workers in the informal sector, female street vendors are limited in terms of welfare, social security, living conditions, and quality of life.

This paper shares part of the research results of the scientific research project *Women street vendors: Gender roles in the family and society* conducted in 2023. The project studies the implementation of gender roles by women street vendors, factors affecting the implementation of gender roles, thereby making recommendations to promote effective implementation of gender roles and enhance the status of this group of women in the family and society. The research was conducted in Hanoi – the urban place that attracts many street vendors. Women street vendors are the main research subjects. The selection criteria are women street vendors who are married to clarify their gender roles in the family and in society. Women street vendors are selected as those who have been doing street vending for at least one year, up to the time of the interview, so that they have practical experience related to this job.

Street Vendor in Hanoi  
Source: iStock.com



The research conducted 27 in-depth interviews, of which 20 in-depth interviews with street vendors and other in-depth interviews with male street vendors, leaders of the *City Women's Union*, gender experts, and social experts. The study applied a sustainable development approach, feminist methodology, qualitative research techniques, and a combination of primary and secondary data.

The research examined the implementation of gender roles by street vendors, the factors affecting the implementation of gender roles, and proposed recommendations to promote the effective implementation of gender roles and improve the status of this group of women in the family and society.

## 2. The Portrait of Female Street Vendors and Diverse Gender Roles

Street vending is a gender issue. Although there are no specific statistics, it is easy to see that the number of female vendors is greater than that of men, due to the flexible nature of the job. Because there is no business registration, no management by agencies or organizations, street vendors are vulnerable and need attention. In Vietnam, the trend of *feminization* of street vending is clearly shown with the proportion of women participating in street vending being higher than that of men. Street vending is also associated with internal

migration, so it shares the *feminized* nature of migration. However, there are few studies on street vending as well as studies on the gender aspects of this job.

Gender roles are the functions and responsibilities of women and men according to the social and community concepts and expectations of each gender. It can be said that gender roles are social roles, including a series of behaviours and attitudes that are often considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on that person's gender. Gender roles in each society can be different. In Vietnam, the traditional gender view of *men are public, women are private* (society expects men to go out to earn money and take care of important matters; women stay home to take care of the kitchen) has changed gradually. However, the role and position of women are still limited compared to men, due to the influence of patriarchal ideology.

In this paper, gender roles are understood as the productive, reproductive and community roles that street vendors perform in the family and in society. Most of the street vendors in this study migrated from rural areas to Hanoi or lived in suburban areas, leaving in the morning and returning in the evening. According to existing studies, the social portrait of informal sector workers, including street vendors, is described as a group of poor workers, with low education levels, no skills, no means of practice other than labour, simple work. Economically, female street vendors have income but not high, lacking stability. Selling goods without

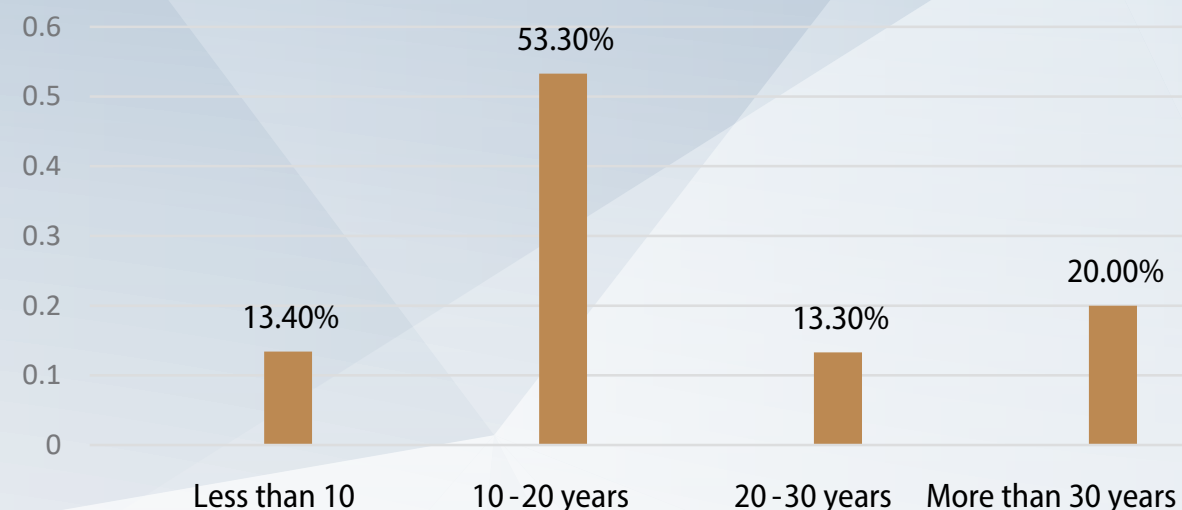
a fixed location: on sidewalks, streets, not subject to business registration, small scale, long working hours, no social insurance, health insurance, no allowances. Their main products are agricultural products, fresh flowers, fruits or buying and selling scrap iron, phone screen stickers, selling hairpins, earrings... mainly low-capital, low-value items but necessary for consumption. The study shows several main characteristics of female street vendors.

*Firstly*, female street vendors are at an age where it is difficult to compete in the labour market. The female street vendors participating in the survey were all between the ages of 40 and over 60 years old. The youngest was born in 1984, the oldest in 1961. In fact, workers over 40 years old face many difficulties in finding jobs in agencies, factories, and enterprises due to barriers related to age, health, and strict requirements from recruiting businesses. Many businesses only employ workers between the ages of 18 and 35. For female workers without professional qualifications, employment opportunities are even lower. Thus, while the majority of migrants are concentrated at the young age group, from 20 to 39 years old, with a median age of 28 according to the 2019 Population and Housing Census by the General Statistics Office and the United Nations Population Fund, migrant street vendors are mostly not young people.

*Second*, female street vendors have low professional qualifications. The highest educational attainment is 12/12, most of whom dropped out of school in junior high school. Many female street vendors regret dropping out of school early, or their families cannot afford to send them to school. However, they care about their children's education, so that they can have a career and a job in the future. All female street vendors in the survey were uneducated and had no stable jobs, so they chose to sell on the street to earn an income to support themselves and their families. Some have been doing street vending job for 34 years, while many others have been doing the job for 10–20 years. Chart 1 shows that up to 53.3 per cent of female street vendors participating in the survey have been involved in street vending for 10–20 years, 13.3 per cent have been involved in street vending for 20–30 years, 20 per cent have been involved in more than 30 years, only 13.4 per cent have been involved in street vending for less than 10 years but have been involved in street vending for at least seven years and two months at the time of the survey. Thus, for them, street vending is truly a profession. One of the reasons why informal workers,



Figure 1: Years of street vending of female street vendors



Source: The author

including street vendors, are involved in informal jobs for a long time, according to the General Statistics Office and the International Labour Organization (2022), is due to limitations in technical expertise that prevent them from changing their jobs even though the income from that job sometimes does not ensure minimum living conditions.

It can be said that street vending has brought them not only income, but also has become their livelihood. Street vending for them is simply *going to the market (đi chợ)*, they are attached to the street vending profession because of its flexibility, no time constraints, income and expenses, not having to sit around without income. *Selling goods (bán hàng)*, for them, is an interesting job because they can interact with customers, travel, go out, instead of staying at home, having no job, no income to support themselves and their families. In many places, street vending is a profession, *the whole village goes to the market*.

Third, the female street vendors surveyed were all married, came from rural areas and had children. Some brought their children to Hanoi for convenience. There were also cases where they left their children in the countryside for their husbands and parents to take care of, focusing on earning income to send back to their families. Rural areas, according to the General Statistics Office and the International Labour Organization (2022), are at a disadvantage compared to urban areas, with nearly three-quarters of Vietnam's informal

I just go to the market; I don't do anything else. My family doesn't have land for cultivation. In the past, when my sister's land was reclaimed, she was compensated with tens of millions Vietnamese dong, but now she has no land left. (In-depth interview, female street vendor, 47 years old)

Working in the fields in the countryside is also hard, sometimes it is not enough to pay for the children's school fees. For one semester, I have to cultivate 3 sào of rice fields in my hometown, and every time I have to pay for my children's school fees, I have to sell all the rice, and it is not enough to pay for school fees. That is why I have to come here to go to the market to earn money to raise my children. At first, I collected scrap metal, then I switched to selling fruits to earn money to raise my children. (In-depth interview, female street vendor, 47 years old)

workers residing there. The rate of informal workers in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas, 77.9 compared to 52.0 per cent.

Fourth, female street vendors have difficult family and living conditions. They rent a small room of 10–15m<sup>2</sup>, with simple furniture, living with roommates or with their families. Most of them are from the suburbs of



Vietnam's national action programme on women, peace, security, 2024

Source: <https://english.vov.vn/en/society/government-ap-proves-national-action-programme-on-women-peace-security-post1074408.vov>

Hanoi, people from other provinces who have no jobs, have little land, so they must go to the city to sell goods. There are also cases where women who sell goods on the street have houses in Hanoi, and take advantage of the opportunity to sell goods, leaving in the morning and returning in the evening. Some cases have husbands who are sick, have strokes, or the husbands gamble, drink, and have young children, so it is very difficult. There are cases where both husband and wife sell goods on the street, or the wife sells goods on the street, the husband is a construction worker. There are no cases where the husband has a job with a stable monthly salary. Both husband and wife do informal work, or the husband is unemployed, and the wife is the economic pillar of the family.

Fifth, the reasons for their migration to sell goods on the street are very diverse. Some people migrate to sell goods on the street because there is no work in the countryside, so the whole village leaves the fields to sell goods in the city. Some people migrate to sell goods on the street because of difficult economic conditions, not ensuring income. Or the husband gambles, drinks, and abuses, so the wife leaves the countryside to the city to do mobile trading, occasionally returning to keep the family in harmony. There are cases where friends invite them to go to the city to sell goods on the street. There are cases where couples divorce in the countryside, the wife takes the children to the city to live and sell goods on the street. There are also people who sell goods on the street because they run out of money, because they owe money, while having no other means of livelihood, they must save up to live and pay off debts. The common reason for selling on the street is

to make a living, besides, selling on the street has many advantages for them, including not having to worry about premises like selling fixed goods, while renting premises is impossible with their economic situation.

Lack of land for cultivation is also a reason, besides high family expenses while agricultural income is low.

Sixth, the items sold by street vendors are quite diverse, such as flowers, fruits, and snacks. Fruits can be traded seasonally – oranges in the orange season, longans in the longan season, mangos in the mango season, and sometimes a mixture of several types of fruit. In some cases, in front of schools and universities, they sell fish balls, grilled meat skewers, candy, sticky rice, bread, and snacks; dried foods, onions, dried garlic, eggs; or vegetables and food at the local market. Each street vendor also flexibly determines the items they sell, meeting the needs of the market and their business location. In some cases, they rotate many different items to choose the right item, such as first selling bread, then switching to selling sticky rice, selling cassava, and finally deciding to switch to selling fruit all year round. The selling location is also flexible, if they can't sell well in one area, they move to another. Thus, it can be seen that female street vendors are always flexible and concerned about business strategies so that their business and trade can be as smooth and stable as possible in the unstable nature of street vending work.

### 3. Gender Role Performance of Street Vendor Women

#### Productive role performance of female street vendors

Street vendors perform three basic gender roles: productive, reproductive, and community roles. Although all three roles are important, the productive role is the crucial one, in which street vendors play contributes to hunger eradication and poverty reduction, primarily at the household level. Women's participation in economic activities, at any level and in any type of work, contributes to the economic development of the country and the household (Jones 2014). Street vending is a livelihood chosen by many rural women, simply because it is a sales job, allows them to meet, socialize, go here and there to see the streets, and earn an income. This was mentioned by most of the street vendors interviewed. Some people think that street vending is fun. Street vendors enjoy their work because they get to socialize, hear, and see changes in life (Mori 2008). Women, especially women



aged 40 and over, choose to sell goods on the street for health and age reasons, not meeting the requirements of the labour market. In addition, the process of industrialization, modernization and urbanization has significantly affected the movement, change and development of the family, the strong movement of workers from rural areas to urban areas and industrial zones. For many women, selling goods on the street is their last livelihood, “whether we like it or not, because there is no other job.” (Ms. H, female street vendor, 54 years old) Selling goods on the street has become a way to earn a living for many people.

Female street vendors are all passionate about their work, staying up late and waking up early, working hard from morning to night to make a living. Regardless of the rain, wind, and the biting cold of winter, many women go from 3–4 am to get goods from the wholesale markets; on weekdays, they sometimes must go from 1 am to get goods. Some women also take on other jobs to earn money to take care of their children and families. Their working hours are long, and rest time are very limited. Thus, the products they sell may be different, but female street vendors are all hard-working and diligent in making a living.

The income of female street vendors is generally two hundred to three hundred thousand Vietnamese dong per day if the weather is favourable and the goods are easily obtained. Each month, female street vendors can earn six to seven million Vietnamese dong. Some women combine two jobs at the same time and earn about ten million Vietnamese dong, but it is still difficult for them due to the high spending level in the city, high cost of living, and high cost of house rent.

Female street vendors have quite proactive survival strategies, from choosing goods, selling locations to purchasing sources. They are proactive in finding sources of goods, learning through business partners, and do not need an introduction to reduce unnecessary costs. This is also the benefit created by social network relationships, contributing to connecting traders and businesses together, helping to reduce intermediary costs and increase profits. Nguyen Duy Linh's (2022) research on street vendors in Hanoi also shows that street vendors are quite flexible and intelligent. They flexibly use the typical *guerrilla tactics* (*chiến thuật du kích*) of street vendors. According to Nguyen Duy Linh (2022), street vendors are divided into three groups: mobile, semi-mobile, and static. The mobile group is those who always carry goods with them and are always ready to move. The mobile group is ready to move when *something happens*. They quickly move

when the police and patrols come. The fixed group is those who sell at a fixed location for a long time. The choice of sales location of female street vendors, in this study, is strategic, most of them choose locations that attract a lot of customers, suitable for the business items. Vegetable and fruit sellers often choose locations in traditional markets; snack sellers choose locations near schools; bread sellers choose mobile forms that go through residential areas; food sellers choose locations near offices or markets. The coping strategies of female street vendors are also reflected in balancing monthly expenses, especially for those with difficult family circumstances and low income from street vending. Most female street vendors do not intend to expand their sales scale, only hoping to receive support for their stalls to sell stably in large markets. Or they only expand their business when they have stable products. For most of them, expanding their business scale is difficult, for many different reasons such as wanting flexibility, lack of capital, difficulty arranging business premises, or poor health that prevents them from carrying many goods.

#### *Reproductive role performance of female street vendors*

The mobile, flexible nature of street vending and the long working hours make it difficult for street vendors to fulfil their reproductive role. The research results show that street vendors are always working, even when they are at home. The street vendors interviewed are all farmers and hard-working women. Therefore, cleaning the house, taking care of family members (in case they live with their family), or cleaning the rented house is not a heavy job for them. The flexibility of work also helps them to be more proactive in adjusting their trading and business. For street vendors who migrate from the provinces to Hanoi and rent a house to live with friends, they still must take care of their children and family members through asking and guiding them from afar. Although there has been significant progress, the idea that women do housework and take care of their husbands and children still exists, forcing female street vendors to sacrifice their habits and interests to take care of their husbands, children, and families.

Some street vendors have support and work sharing from other family members such as husbands, children, and parents voluntarily. This is also the motivation that makes them feel secure in making a living in a foreign land and hope for a better future for their children. The mother's dream of having good children, having stable jobs and careers in the future helps them to be more steadfast. One thing that street vendors have in

common is that they love their children very much and do not want their children to have to work hard like themselves.

Raising and caring for children is a concern and worry for street vendors. For many of them, this is an important strategy, so that their children have a foundation of education, aiming for a good future for them. This is the good meaning that street vendors bring to society and their families. In addition to enhancing women's economic power through job creation and income generation, street vendors also help enhance the educational power of future generations. Female street vendors who live far from their families are often concerned about their children in the countryside, worrying about their safety, especially their daughters. Therefore, they visit their hometowns quite often, when there are death anniversaries, weddings, or when they visit their children. It can be said that the flexibility of the job helps strengthen the relationship between street vendors and their families, with their neighbours, as well as the connection between rural and urban areas.

Despite taking care of their family members, female street vendors do not take much care of themselves, both physically and mentally. Female street vendors have very little time to rest, to restore their labour, and take care of themselves. Their main relaxation is watching TV. Some women *gossip with their neighbours*. If they are sick, they rest for one to two days and then get up to sell, buy medicine themselves instead of going to the doctor. Normally, they do not take care of themselves. Some women even think that sleeping with themselves is too luxurious. Going to the doctor or having regular health check-ups is even more luxurious for most female street vendors.

#### *Community role performance of female street vendors*

Due to migration to the city, or in some cases female street vendors in the suburbs of Hanoi, they do not participate in community activities. Most female street vendors do not participate in community activities in the locality, including female street vendors with permanent residence. They are also not fully aware of the benefits of community activities. In addition, local community activities have not attracted them. Most of them give the reason that they do not have time.

The connection with the local community at both the departure and destination is therefore very limited. Limited participation in community activities greatly



Street vendor in Hanoi

Source: iStock.com/tonyshawphotography

affects their social integration in urban areas. On the contrary, social integration inspires migrants to participate in community activities. This is also confirmed in the study of Zhang et al. (2023). The authors emphasize that the three main factors of community participation are social capital, use of public space, and community participation strategies. Community participation helps migrants address inequality, social exclusion, and adaptation between rural and urban areas. Participation in community activities also helps reduce tensions between migrants and local residents, meets the needs of migrants, expands social networks, and facilitates psychological integration. Blaming it on *no time* or not having any activities to participate in shows that female street vendors are not interested in community activities and do not have a specific strategy for community participation.



Gender awareness of community activities of some female street vendors is still limited. For some women, the traditional gender view of *men are public, women are private* is still deeply ingrained in their minds. That makes it difficult for them to release them from their dependence on men. Surprisingly, the challenge for women in participating in community activities is not age, knowledge, or education level, but the lack of goodwill of local authorities, or people in temporary residence, but *lack of time or disinterest*. Lack of time is the reason for coping, disinterest is the root cause. On the one hand, because community activities are not new, not attractive to migrants. On the other hand, migrants do not see the benefits of participating in community activities at the destination, maybe the support for them is limited or non-existent. Temporary living, unstable accommodation is also the reason why community participation of street vendors and migrants in general is limited.

4. Recommendations

The Vietnamese State needs to have preferential policies for street vendors to sell in traditional markets, have stable seats with preferential rental prices. Up to 100 per cent of female street vendors interviewed shared their desire to have a stable place to sell, not having to run when the police chase them, and not having their goods confiscated. They want to have income for themselves and their families, so they accept street vendors, even though they know that sometimes they violate the law on selling on urban roads, on sidewalks of streets with regulations prohibiting selling, or accidentally violate regulations. Some female street vendors even keep a handful of fines, as a *professional souvenir*.

The Vietnamese State needs to have specific regulations on stall trading, stall size, avoid setting up stalls with oversized sizes, encroaching on space, affecting public order. Have preferential policies for street vendors, create a fair business environment, ensure food hygiene and safety according to the law. Consider street vending as a profession, have specific regulations, so that street vendors can earn a living, contribute to development.

Vietnam Women’s Union needs to organize online sales technology training courses so that female street vendors can access modern technology in their livelihood. In addition, it is necessary to train female street vendors in sales skills, self-protection skills, and



Street Vendor in Hanoi  
Source: iStock.com

reporting skills when their rights and dignity are violated. It is necessary to establish a savings credit model for female street vendors, like the TYM fund’s microcredit model currently being implemented in different provinces. This model needs to be implemented with female street vendors at the destination, helping them manage their income most effectively.

The community needs to have a correct view of the work and contributions of street vendors; respect and protect street vendors from the risks of human rights and dignity violations. In addition, men in the family and family members need to share housework, encourage street vendors and appreciate their efforts and contributions to the family and community.

In addition to that, street vendors need to increase their learning and improve their social knowledge to be able to best develop their potential and strengths, contributing to the development of individuals, families and society. Street vendors need to participate more in social activities, training courses on gender, social knowledge, legal knowledge; and pay attention to their physical, mental and personal safety.

5. Conclusion

Female street vendors are important informal economic actors, making positive contributions to the country’s economic development, helping to sketch a vibrant and diverse urban picture. Female street vendors still face many difficulties in performing their gender roles, especially their community roles, due to limited awareness of participating in community activities. Female street vendors themselves lack confidence and autonomy when participating in community activities. Research on female street vendors is still limited, compared to other research topics. There needs to be more research on street vendors as well as exploiting the gender aspect, as a basis for making intervention policies, on the one hand, enhancing the economic and social contributions of female street vendors; on the other hand, promoting the protection of rights and dignity for this vulnerable group. In addition, it is necessary to recognize street vending as an official profession, aiming to establish a Street Vendor Association, with regulations to protect the rights, dignity and interests of street vendors. In addition, it is important to do research some occupations that are typical of men to have evidence to assess the impact, level of influence and gender differences.

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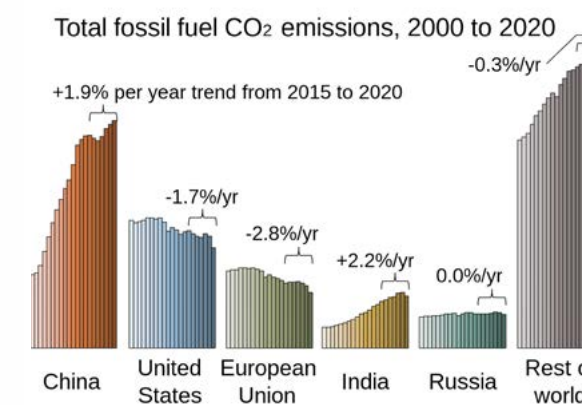
# Climate Policy and Its Implementation in Germany and Vietnam

● Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang and Detlef Briesen

Climate change has become a global priority, demanding coordinated efforts across nations to mitigate its effects and adapt to its consequences. This article examines the climate policies of two countries with distinct socio-economic contexts: Germany, a developed industrial nation with a long history of environmental regulation, and Vietnam, a developing country that has rapidly integrated climate change considerations into its policy framework in recent decades. While Germany's environmental policies have evolved through decades of industrialization and environmental awareness, Vietnam's approach has been shaped by its economic transformation and international commitments, particularly under the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. This comparative analysis explores the development, implementation, and challenges of climate policy in both countries, highlighting the successes and ongoing obstacles each faces in their pursuit of sustainable development and environmental protection. Through this lens, the article provides insights into the complexities of translating international climate agreements into effective national action, reflecting on the lessons that can be learned from both Germany's and Vietnam's experiences.

## 1. Environment and Climate Protection as Policy Fields

Climate protection is part of environmental protection policy and is therefore not an isolated policy field: many climate protection measures are often included in environmental regulations; sometimes climate protection conflict with other environmental goals, such as nature and landscape conservation. Climate protection is the provisional ending point of a development that began massively around 1970 and has since developed into a policy field of paramount importance worldwide. Many societal actors are involved in it (as in environmental issues in general), governmental and non-governmental organisations, commercial enterprises and private individuals. They all operate in a variety of interdependencies at local, regional, national, supranational, international and global level. Regarding state institutions, in addition to national environmental ministries and authorities, numerous organizations have emerged over the last 50 years that have a cross-border or global focus. One particularly important organisation is the *UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, IPCC (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2024).



Since 2000, rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in China and the rest of the world have surpassed the output of the United States and Europe.

Source: By Efrazil - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=87714574>

Environmental and climate protection has developed into an essential core function of state policy and saw a myriad of implementation regimes. The state attempts to respond to ecological challenges and external environmental effects because of its inherent objectives (such as its general protective functions), for economic reasons and because there is societal demand for this. All concrete measures are faced with a dilemma, as climate/environmental protection is a so-called cross-sectional policy. It overlaps with other policy areas such as industry, agriculture, energy, transport, urban development and health (Edenhofer 2019; Dessler/Parson 2020).

Working for Net Zero Goals  
Source: Source: iStock.com/Weedesign



Modern environmental policy began in the 19th century with the first laws to protect air, water and soil. From this local control of emissions to today's global climate protection, the areas of responsibility have continuously expanded, and its forms of control and instruments have changed. This has happened through its institutionalisation and continuous change within the framework of various policy cycles. They take place on a national level and, especially in climate protection, also on an international one, resulting in the emergence of numerous GOs and NGOs and powerful lobby groups that are anchored in industry and media to varying degrees at national levels. Climate policy is therefore not socio-politically neutral, but the object of conflicts of interest: at national and even more so at international level (Könneke/Adolphsen 2024).

### The role of international climate agreements

Climate protection is a policy field that, at least in terms of its ambition, is largely characterised by global players: especially by the UN, through the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2024), which it co-founded, numerous international governmental and non-governmental organisations and major private donors. In addition to countless conferences, studies and mitigation projects, the international climate agreements are the most notable result of these diverse activities. Nevertheless, neither in environmental protection in general nor particularly in climate protection is there a competent world government (Lieven 2020), even if certain NGOs appoint themselves as such. The framework for government measures, social debates and private initiatives continues to be the nation state, and in Europe additionally the supranational European Union. In many cases, this does not prevent highly selective interpretations of the more than 1,300 multilateral environmental agreements that have been negotiated up to 2020 alone from prevailing, particularly in the discourse of environmental activists. However, not even experts are able to gain an overview of these (Mitchell 2020).

The crucial international climate agreements that have been negotiated since 1992 are listed in chronological order here:

- The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro: Agenda 21 & COP (1992).
- Climate summit COP3 and the Kyoto Protocol (1997).
- COP9 and the Clean Development Mechanism (Milan 2003).

- COP18 and Kyoto II (Doha 2012).
- COP 21 and the Paris Agreement (Paris 2015).

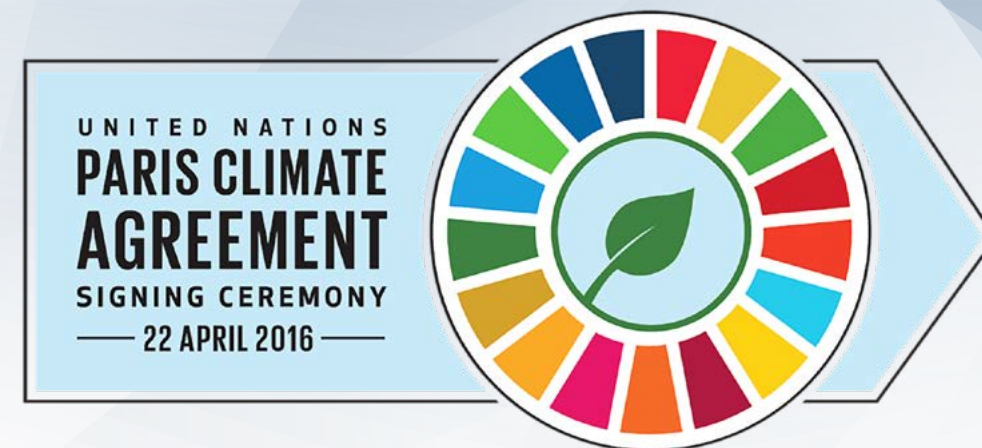
The most important convention at present is the *Paris Agreement* (United Nations. Treaty Collection 2024). Its objective is defined in Article 2 as *improving the implementation* of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This is to be achieved through three sets of measures:

- Goal 1: Limiting the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, defined as the average of the years between 1850 and 1900. The aim is to reduce the risks and effects of climate change.
- Goal 2: Increase the capacity to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change, promote resilience and development that is low in greenhouse gas emissions and does not jeopardise food production.
- Goal 3: Reconciling financial flows with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilient development.

The Paris Agreement provides for various measures for the concrete implementation of these three goals, only a selection of which can be summarised here.

- Goal 1: Creation of national climate action plans with corresponding CO<sub>2</sub> reduction targets and reporting obligations to the UN on the success of the measures in the context of a transparency framework.
- Goal 2: Promote climate resilience through structural measures in the areas of coastal protection, agriculture, urban heat management, water and energy management. In addition, promotion of lower greenhouse gas emissions through the conversion of energy production, for example.
- Goal 3: Expansion of climate finance, which is intended especially to help developing countries to switch to a more climate-neutral economy and mitigate damage.

Global climate agreements are not the outcome of pure science but are based on politically negotiated compromises. Politicians and other actors such as NGOs represent the interests of their states, voter groups or supporters and rather often use selective interpretations of the results of climate research (Bojanowski 2024). However, serious research should also communicate the uncertainties and risks of its statements; this applies to the complex forecasts communicated in the *World Climate Report*, for example (IPCC 2023). Prognoses,



22 April 2016 High-Level Signature Ceremony for the Paris Agreement

Source: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/04/parisagreementsignatures/>

on the other hand, are so-called arguable predictions, which means that there are always deviations between the forecast and the actual event. Therefore, almost no scientific prognosis is parameter free and can therefore be completely wrong. Considering the complexity of the fundamental problem of *global climate change* and the variety of mitigation methods only hinted at here, it becomes clear at what level of uncertainty a global, proactive climate policy operates – quite independently of the question of whether and how the defined measures are implemented in the national context at all.

## 2. An Example: Environmental and Climate Policy in the Federal Republic of Germany

It is becoming evident how important national climate policy is for the actual implementation of international climate agreements. To describe this more precisely, we are using the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Union as a case study for obvious reasons.

The Federal Republic of Germany is traditionally an industrialised country with numerous environmentally intensive sectors (such as energy, road transport, chemicals, construction). These sectors experienced high growth in the years between 1949 and 1973. By this time, the associated environmental problems had worsened in a similar way to other highly developed industrialised countries. Germany's environmental policy can thus be used to show how environmental policy has been given more and more tasks, including climate protection. Of particular importance here

are implementation, forms of control, development of instruments, creation of capacities for action and their vertical integration within the framework of the European Union (Jänicke 2024).

### Implementation

The concept of the policy cycle and the implementation of political programmes, which were briefly outlined in the introduction, are decisive for an analysis of the emergence and development of Germany's environmental and climate policy: Problem definition, agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, evaluation and re-definition or termination. In Germany, the entire issue was first placed on the political agenda on a massive scale in the 1960s, and its institutionalisation began in the 1970s through

- the creation of legal foundations (federal competence for environmental issues with numerous subsequent laws, and *National Strategy for Sustainable Development* in 2001),
- and the establishment of federal institutions (e.g. 1974 Federal Environment Agency).

Environmental policy in Germany takes place in identifiable cycles that are significantly influenced by factors such as changes of government, external influences (the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters for example) and the activities of national and international governmental and non-governmental organisations (Hünemörder 2004). Since the late 1990s Germany has followed the trend of expanding its environmental policy to include climate policy. The most important results of this policy expansion are





Environmental policy: How is climate protection planned?

Source: <https://www.umwelt-im-unterricht.de/wochenthemen/umweltpolitik-wie-wird-klimaschutz-geplant>

- The *Renewable Energy Sources Act* (2000) and its eight subsequent amendments; it regulates the preferential infeed of electricity from renewable sources into the grid and guarantees both commercial and private producers fixed feed-in tariffs.
- The *Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Act* (2004); in Germany, this is the legal basis for national trading in allowances for the emission of greenhouse gases in an EU-wide system (EU ETS).
- The *Federal Climate Protection Act of 2019* (KSG); it is intended to ensure the fulfilment of national climate protection targets and its compliance with European ones. The Act sets out general and sector targets for the first time in the Climate Protection Plan 2050. The aim is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 65 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. A reduction of 88 per cent is to be achieved by 2040 and net greenhouse gas neutrality by 2045.

The Federal Climate Protection Act is a framework law that sets out principles and obligations for climate policy at federal, state and municipal level. Accordingly, the measures following the Act and its amendment in 2024 can hardly be described in detail.

Regarding the Federal Republic as a whole, it can be said that the Climate Protection Act has a profound impact on industrial, agricultural, energy, transport and housing policy. These effects are the subject of considerable socio-political debate and conflicts of interest, as the measures have led to a significant increase in energy prices for industry and consumers. Germany now has some of the highest energy prices in the world (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz 2024).

Looking at the federal states and municipalities, the Climate Protection Act has been accompanied by a wave of new regulations. The variety of measures can only be rudimentarily illustrated here using the example of the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg and its municipalities. The state laws require, among other things

- obligation for local authorities to record their energy consumption and to carry out heating planning,
- mandatory installation of photovoltaic systems on newly constructed buildings and for fundamental roof renovations,
- integrated energy and climate protection concept (IEKK),
- measures to adapt to climate change,
- preparation of climate mobility plans,
- climate protection agreements with companies, and
- increased anchoring of sustainable construction in funding programmes.

### Forms of control

If the interpretation is correct that the most recent climate measures have brought more top-down approaches back into environmental policy, this would indeed be a deep change. Environmental policy in Federal Republic began top-down indeed. Since then, however, the spectrum of actors involved has become increasingly differentiated: Through a multitude of levels of action, a broad participation of important organised interests and through an increased individual responsibility of companies, without which, for example, innovation-oriented environmental protection is unthinkable. Environmental governance is increasingly no longer taking place through governmental control, but through cooperative relationships, often in a broad network of state and non-state actors, for which the term cooperative state was introduced above. The sustainability goals according to the corresponding German strategy have also increasingly been realised via multi-level systems (global, European, national, regional, municipal). They offer a multitude of opportunities for *horizontal learning* by innovators and for the transfer of innovations.

### Development of instruments

Until the most recent legal amendments, the instruments of environmental policy have also become increasingly diverse. Modern environmental policy began in the Federal Republic with state legislation and its standards,

authorisation procedures, bans and prohibitions. It soon became apparent how much the rapidly growing density of regulations overburdened the legislative state, its implementing bodies and the respective addressees of the programmes. Following the results of implementation research outlined above, a transition from top-down control to regulatory policies took place in environmental policy. These instruments allow greater scope for adaptation and mobilise the individual responsibility of the actors. The prime example from Europe and Germany is emissions trading in climate protection. Although it requires binding upper limits for pollutant emissions, it allows for flexible adjustments, e.g. by individual companies. A second example of regulatory policies is the German instrument of statutory feed-in tariffs for electricity from renewable energy sources. Modern environmental and climate policy is therefore based on a few strategic, verifiable targets that can be realised with a variety of instruments. Critics therefore denounce the fact that the latest decisions in energy policy (phasing out nuclear energy, foreseeable ban on combustion engines for motor vehicles, initially planned exclusive promotion of heat pumps as part of the Building Energy Act) have initiated a U-turn towards top-down control.

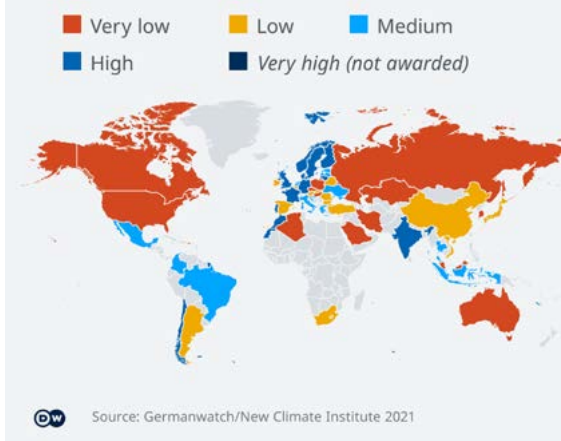
### Environmental policy capabilities

The previous remarks already indicate the high capacity of the Federal Republic of Germany to act on environmental issues. This results primarily from two factors:

*Firstly*, Germany's role in technology-based problem solving. Since the end of the 1990s, the country has secured itself a leading international position in technologies for air pollution control, waste policy and climate protection. The manufacturing industry in particular sees environmental protection in terms of industrial policy and ecological modernisation. This is reflected in a strong environmental industry, whose turnover share of GDP was estimated at 15 per cent in 2016 (Bundesumweltamt 2018). It had an average annual growth rate of 8.8 per cent up to 2018 and a high global market share of 14 per cent (Bundesumweltamt 2018). To date, Germany has been a developed industrialised country with considerable potential for innovation due to its high level of research and development (industrial research, Fraunhofer Gesellschaft, universities of applied sciences) and the financial support it receives from organisations such as the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU) and the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW).

### Climate Change Performance Index 2022

Overall rating of the top 61 emitters



International Comparison of Climate Protection Implementation

Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-change-performance-index-scandinavians-top-of-the-class/a-59760889>

*Secondly*, there is a strong environmental lobby group with over six million members in the context of the New Social Movements. These are joined by environmentally committed business organisations (B.A.U.M.) or the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. The Green (ecologist) Party is an important influencing factor. It was part of the governing coalition at federal level from 1998 to 2005 and since 2021. Importantly, the party is currently represented in 15 out of 16 state parliaments and is involved in 10 out of 16 state governments. The positive framework conditions continue to include environmental education in schools and universities. The mass media, especially the public broadcasters and some other flag-ship media, are now clearly geared towards reporting in favour of an ecological transformation and the need for climate policy measures to save Germany and even the world.

### Vertical integration: environmental and climate policy in the EU's multi-level system

The EC and the European Union have been a central determinant of German environmental policy since it was enshrined in the EC Treaty in 1986 and especially since the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997). Since then, the member states have had to consider the EU provisions on environmental protection and sustainable development in their respective national policies

(Dupont et al. 2023). As a result, the importance of the EU for national environmental, nature and climate protection has increased considerably over the last 30 years. However, the higher density of regulation by the EU goes hand in hand with enforcement deficits in Germany, for example.

What is particularly important is that the EU can issue directives in the following areas of environmental policy, which it regularly reviews in the form of mandatory national reports:

biodiversity, water protection, circular economy and air pollution.

With Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 (*European Climate Law*), the EU has presented a framework law with ambitious climate targets, which also significantly pre-structures the policy in Germany. The Climate Law can only be presented here in its main features (Europäische Kommission 2022; EUR-Lex. Access to European Law 2024). The regulation applies to all anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases, in particular carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) as well as their decomposition in sinks for greenhouse gases (especially forests).

- The aim of the Climate Law is to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of EU member states to net zero by 2050. From this date, no more greenhouse gases may be emitted than are removed in carbon sinks. From 2050, the EU is even aiming for a corresponding net reduction by the EU states. The targets of the European Climate Law only apply to the EU as a whole. However, the member states must submit decarbonisation targets in integrated national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and strategies on how they intend to achieve them. Climate protection efforts are to be shared fairly and in solidarity between the EU member states. Specific reduction targets for various economic sectors and for the member states are defined in other legal acts: through provisions on the *EU Emissions Trading System*, which covers and caps emissions in the industry, energy, aviation and shipping sectors across the EU; through the Effort Sharing Regulation for the other economic sectors (buildings and transport) with specific emission caps up to. The LULUCF Regulation contains climate protection obligations for the member states in the areas of land use, land use change and forestry. In addition, there are numerous other legal acts on climate protection at EU level.

- The Climate Law is also intended to continuously improve measures to adapt to global warming. The EU and its individual member states are obliged to develop coherent adaptation strategies. As climate protection is a typical cross-cutting task, these strategies are to be integrated into all policy areas. The European approach is documented in the Adaptation Strategy of 24 February 2021 as *Building a climate-resilient Europe*.

The European Climate Law allows the EU to intervene extensively in national government action. In addition to the classic infringement procedure by the EU, there are further control options: via mandatory reporting of the individual member states to the EU Commission, the evaluation of national measures by the latter and, finally, via a publication obligation towards the EU on the successes or failures of the respective national measures. This can have a considerable impact, particularly in countries with a high degree of mobilisation on environmental issues.

### 3. Another Example: Climate Policy of Vietnam

In contrast to Germany, during the 1990s and early 2000s, Vietnam was still an underdeveloped nation heavily reliant on external support, prioritized economic development and poverty reduction following the Doi Moi (Renovation) economic reforms. Although climate change was recognized, immediate economic concerns overshadowed long-term environmental planning. Nevertheless, Vietnam was an early signatory to the UNFCCC and other global climate commitments.

Vietnam signed the UNFCCC on June 11, 1992, and ratified it on November 16, 1994. The country also signed the Kyoto Protocol on December 3, 1998, and ratified it on September 25, 2002. As a non-Annex I Party, Vietnam was not obligated to commit to quantitative reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as stipulated in the Kyoto Protocol. However, like other developing countries, Vietnam was required to fulfil several common obligations, including:

- Developing a National Communication on Climate Change.
- Conducting a national inventory of GHG emissions from human activities and assessing the amount absorbed by sinks.



Viet Nam may need US\$ 600 billion to achieve carbon neutrality until 2050

Source: <https://en.baochinhphu.vn/viet-nam-may-need-us-600-billion-to-achieve-carbon-neutrality-111230216170320316.htm>

- Evaluating the impacts of climate change on socio-economic sectors and identifying regions and sectors vulnerable to climate change and rising sea levels.
- Developing and implementing measures to adapt to climate change.
- Formulating programs and plans to reduce GHG emissions, contingent on receiving adequate financial support and technology transfer from developed countries and international organizations.
- Conducting research and monitoring activities related to climate and climate change.
- Updating and disseminating information to raise awareness among policymakers and the public on climate change and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment 2019).

While Vietnam's vulnerability to climate change was a key motivation for signing the UNFCCC, the development of internal climate policies took time to materialize. In the early 1990s, awareness of climate change was still growing, and the urgency for specific policies had not yet permeated the national discourse. Vietnam's participation in signing the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol can be viewed as part of its strategy to renew and expand international relations, multi-lateralize and diversify foreign relations. Through these steps, Vietnam demonstrated its recognition of the importance of international cooperation in addressing global challenges like climate change. This participation also strengthened diplomatic relations with other countries and international organizations, contributing to gaining support and assistance needed



Resilience and Decarbonization for Vietnam

Source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/brief/key-highlights-country-climate-and-development-report-for-vietnam>

to address challenges in the Doi Moi process. It was not until the 2000s that Vietnam began to establish a comprehensive framework and develop policies and laws related to climate change.

Policy, and law development and internalization

Since 2005, Vietnam has issued several policies and laws directly related to climate change, including:

- *Directive No. 35 (2005)*: Issued by the Prime Minister for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- *Resolution No. 60/2007/NP-CP (2007)*: Tasked the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment with developing the National Target Program to Respond to Climate Change (NTP-RCC), which was officially launched in 2008.
- *National Target Program to Respond to Climate Change (NTP-RCC) (2008)*: Marked a critical shift, recognizing climate change as a central challenge to Vietnam's sustainable development.
- *National Strategy on Climate Change (2011)*: Focused on integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation into national policies.
- *National Strategy on Green Growth (2012)*: Aimed at restructuring the economy towards sustainability, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and promoting green technology and renewable energy.

The development of the NTP-RCC in 2008 represented a significant shift in acknowledging climate change as a critical challenge to the country's sustainable development. This program emphasizes both mitigation and adaptation strategies, focusing on assessing and



managing the risks posed by climate change across various sectors, including agriculture, water resources, and coastal management (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment 2008). The subsequent National Strategy on Climate Change (2011) and the National Strategy on Green Growth (2012) underscore the need for economic restructuring towards sustainability, with ambitious goals for reducing emissions and integrating green growth into national development plans.

In addition to these strategic frameworks, Vietnam has made significant strides in developing legislative and policy instruments to implement climate change measures. One of the most notable developments in this regard was the enactment of the Law on Environmental Protection (LEP). First introduced in 2005 and revised in 2014 and 2020, the 2020 revision is particularly significant as it includes specific provisions on climate change, making it the first law in Vietnam to directly address this issue. The LEP mandates the inclusion of climate change considerations in national, regional, and sectoral planning, and requires the government to develop detailed action plans for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

In addition to the key policies mentioned above, Vietnam has recently issued numerous laws and policies related to climate change across various sectors, including natural resources, biology, agriculture, forestry, construction, environment, irrigation, transportation, energy, industry, and health. These include significant legislation such as the Law on Dikes, the Law on Economical and Efficient Use of Energy, and the Ordinance on Flood and Storm Prevention. Moreover, several national strategies and adaptation activities have been implemented at both central and local levels, including:

- *Decision No. 1055/QĐ-TTg (July 20, 2020)*: Issued by the Prime Minister, this decision promulgates the National Plan for Climate Change Adaptation for the period 2021–2030, with a vision extending to 2050.
- *Decision No. 148/QĐ-TTg (January 28, 2022)*: This decision establishes the National Climate Change Adaptation Monitoring and Evaluation System.
- *Circular No. 01/2022/TT-BTNMT (January 7, 2022)*: Issued by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, it regulates the assessment of climate change impacts and provides guidelines for national climate assessment.

- *Decision No. 896/QĐ-TTg (July 26, 2022)*: This decision approves the National Strategy on Climate Change for the period up to 2050.

Under Vietnam's National Strategy on Climate Change for the period up to 2050, the target by 2030 is to reduce total national greenhouse gas emissions by 43.5 per cent compared to the business-as-usual (BAU) scenario, with a 32.6 per cent reduction in the energy sector, ensuring that emissions do not exceed 457 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) (Prime Minister 2022). By 2050, the goal is to achieve net-zero emissions, with a peak in emissions by 2035, followed by a rapid decline. Specifically, the energy sector is expected to reduce emissions by 91.6 per cent, limiting them to no more than 101 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e (Prime Minister 2022). These goals align with the commitments Vietnam made to the world at COP26, ensuring the achievement of net-zero emissions by 2050.

To realize these ambitious goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and steering the economy towards low-carbon development, Vietnam has made considerable efforts in developing and issuing policies and regulations at the national, sectoral, and local levels.

The 2020 Law on Environmental Protection includes specific regulations on the responsibilities of enterprises, particularly those required to conduct greenhouse gas inventories, as outlined in Clause 7, Article 91. To implement these regulations, the Vietnamese Government issued Decree No. 06/2022/ND-CP on January 7, 2022, which governs greenhouse gas emission reduction and ozone layer protection. Additionally, on January 18, 2022, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 01/2022/QĐ-TTg, listing sectors and establishments that must conduct greenhouse gas inventories. These documents contribute to strengthening the legal framework needed to achieve the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets set out in Vietnam's Nationally Determined Contribution and the National Strategy on Climate Change.

#### *Implementation of international commitments and obligations*

Vietnam's climate change policies are closely aligned with its international commitments, particularly under the Paris Agreement. In October 2016, the government issued Decision No. 2053/QĐ-TTg, which outlined the implementation plan for the Paris Agreement on climate change. This plan specifies Vietnam's commitments to the international community in addressing climate change and includes five main components:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Adapting to climate change.
- Mobilizing resources.
- Establishing a transparent and public monitoring system.
- Developing and refining policies and institutions.

As part of its international commitment, Vietnam submits its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which sets forth the country's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 9 per cent by 2030 compared to the business-as-usual scenario, with the possibility of increasing this target to 27 per cent with international support.

The government has integrated these commitments into national action plans. The Vietnam National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), which is periodically updated, serves as the primary tool for implementing the NDC. The plan details specific measures for emission reduction, climate adaptation, and the promotion of renewable energy. It also includes provisions for monitoring and evaluating the progress of these measures, ensuring that Vietnam meets its climate objectives in line with its international obligations.

#### **4. The Outcomes of German and Vietnamese Environmental and Climate Policy**

It has become clear what a complex policy area environmental and climate protection is. Therefore, it is hardly possible here to go into more detail on the individual successes or failures of implemented political programmes.

In general, however, it can be said that German environmental policy has achieved remarkable results in historical and international comparison. This is particularly true for areas where problems were easily recognisable, identifiable, harmful to human health and caused a high level of public concern: for example, in the reduction of toxic substances in the air, water and soil and the associated direct health damage or nuisance to the population. In these domains, marketable technical solutions to problems quickly became available and could be implemented based on broad coalitions of interests. Regarding the classic environmental problems that have dominated up to now, the successes have been less pronounced in areas where *gradual deterioration* has occurred, such

as land consumption or biodiversity loss, and above all, where the path of technology and innovation-oriented environmental policy (ecological modernisation) is not applicable.

Taking stock of climate policy measures to date would be an even more daring endeavour. It is true that the industry- and technology-based approach to climate protection has also shown initial success, for example in achieving the Kyoto targets as early as 2008 or partly replacing traditional energy production with so-called climate-neutral technologies, primarily through the expansion of wind power. However, the decarbonisation of entire Germany is an ambitious project with very high costs. The question is also increasingly being raised as to whether Germany's high financial contributions will have any significant effect on the global climate at all, especially as large parts of the world are not going down the path of decarbonisation (Sinn 2008).

Although the Vietnamese government began developing its environmental and climate change policy and legal framework much later than developed industrial nations like Germany, it has achieved notable progress in this area. One of the government's most significant successes is the development of a comprehensive legal and policy framework that addresses both mitigation and adaptation strategies across various sectors. The government has secured financial and technical support and invested in capacity-building programs for government officials, researchers, and local communities, enhancing their ability to effectively implement and monitor climate policies.

Vietnam has also successfully integrated its international commitments into national policies, with its efforts in climate change mitigation and adaptation receiving international recognition. The country is often viewed as a model for other developing nations facing similar challenges. Significant strides have been made in raising public awareness about climate change, with climate change education now included in curricula at various levels, preparing future generations to better address climate challenges. Vietnam's proactive approach to climate change presents several opportunities. The country's commitment to green growth and renewable energy development has the potential to attract foreign investment and foster technological innovation. Additionally, Vietnam's experience in managing climate-related disasters positions it as a regional leader in climate adaptation, offering valuable lessons to other developing countries.



Despite these achievements, Vietnam faces several ongoing challenges. A primary obstacle is the need for improved coordination among different levels of government and across various sectors. The financial resources required to meet the ambitious targets set by the NDC and other plans are substantial, and the country remains reliant on international support to close funding gaps. The transition to a low-carbon economy and the effective implementation of adaptation measures require access to advanced technologies. However, Vietnam often encounters barriers in acquiring these technologies due to high costs and limited domestic capacity for development and deployment.

Vietnam's rapid economic growth frequently conflicts with environmental protection and climate change goals. The country's continued reliance on coal and other fossil fuels for energy significantly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, creating a challenging balance between economic development and emission reduction. While efforts have been made to raise public awareness about climate change, there remains a

need for greater public engagement and behavioural change. Many communities, particularly in rural areas, may not fully understand the implications of climate change or the importance of mitigation and adaptation measures, leading to resistance to certain policies, such as changes in land use or energy consumption patterns. Furthermore, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, as a new regulatory requirement, poses additional challenges. The technical and technological capacities, as well as business resources needed for emission reduction activities, are limited, and current policies have not created sufficient incentives to encourage private sector participation. These issues represent significant difficulties in implementing the existing regulations on greenhouse gas emission reduction.

Both Germany and Vietnam illustrate the complexities of translating international climate agreements into effective national actions. While their paths differ, each country's experience offers valuable lessons in balancing economic development with environmental sustainability.

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Vietnamese peacekeepers support the UN Mission in South Sudan's 'Carbon Sink Initiative'

Source: UNMISS/Lieutenant Phuc Nguyen Tien

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# Vietnam's International Cooperation and Integration in the Renovation Period

● Nguyen Van Dap and Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang

## 1. Introduction

International cooperation refers to programmes and activities involving cooperation between Vietnam and international partners, including countries and non-state entities, on various issues or topics or in carrying out a joint activity with a shared goal. International cooperation here is limited to activities carried out by organisations or individuals on behalf of the Vietnamese Government. Consequently, international cooperation activities are shaped within the foreign policy framework, serving Vietnam's foreign and broader national objectives. Therefore, clearly defining foreign policy guidelines at a higher level is a national development strategy and is necessary to determine the direction of Vietnam's international cooperation activities.

For Vietnam, there was a strategic shift in foreign policy in the mid-1980s, primarily moving towards diversifying and multilateralizing foreign relations. The goal of this change was, first and foremost, to address the diplomatic isolation and siege of the 1980s and, subsequently, to support Vietnam's deep integration with the region and the world since the initiation of the Renovation process (Doi Moi). However, it is important to note that the expansion of foreign relations was declared *based on the foundation of ensuring Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity*. Specifically, Vietnam's foreign policy principles are independence, self-reliance, peace, friendship and cooperation, diversification and multilateralization of foreign relations, and active international integration.

Along with the shift in foreign policy, Vietnam's international cooperation activities have also evolved: they have gradually expanded in terms of areas of cooperation and partners and deepened in terms of the level, frequency, and content of cooperation. Significant achievements have been made over nearly 40 years of implementing international cooperation activities, contributing to the effective implementation of Vietnam's foreign policy and the country's development process, despite some limitations in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

The following section analyses changes in the thinking of the Communist Party and the Vietnamese Government regarding foreign affairs and international cooperation over different periods. The article then presents the practical implementation of international cooperation policies and activities in specific fields in Vietnam. From this, the article provides some evaluations of the achievements and limitations of Vietnam's international cooperation process since the initiation of the Renovation process (Doi Moi).





Vietnamese peacekeepers support the UN Mission in South Sudan's 'Carbon Sink Initiative'  
Source: UNMISS/Lieutenant Phuc Nguyen Tien  
Public domain

## 2. Vietnam's Policy and Direction on International Cooperation and Integration

In 1986, in response to international changes and the demands of national development, the Communist Party of Vietnam proposed a comprehensive renovation policy, starting with a renewal of economic thinking and extending to foreign affairs (Nguyen Phu Trong 2023, 25). The Politburo's Resolution No. 13-NQ/TW dated May 20, 1988, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, advocated building "an open foreign policy" as one of the three essential conditions for ensuring national security. This significant transition was a premise for breakthroughs in foreign activities and provided the basis for developing a foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, multilateralism, diversification, and international integration. Since then, the Communist Party has gradually renewed its understanding and approach to foreign affairs. The document of the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in 1991 stated:

"Vietnam wants to be friends with all countries in the world community, striving for peace, independence, and development." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2007, 49, 51)

In the context of deepening globalisation, the Party has remained steadfast in its international integration policy through a focused and prioritised approach. In the document of the Eighth National Party Congress in 1996, for the first time, the party introduced the term economic integration and emphasised the need to: "accelerate the process of regional and global economic integration" (Communist Party of Vietnam 2007, 55) to support the country's development goals. This marked a fundamental shift in understanding the need for

Vietnam to actively and proactively integrate into the global market.

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Ninth National Party Congress in 2001 affirmed:

"Consistently implement an independent, self-reliant, open foreign policy, with the diversification and multilateralization of international relations. Vietnam is ready to be a friend and reliable partner of countries in the international community, striving for peace, independence, and development." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2007, 60)

By the Tenth Party Congress in 2006, the party clearly stated:

"Actively and proactively integrate into the international economy, while expanding international cooperation in other areas." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2007, 65)

With this direction, international cooperation in defence, security, culture, and society was strengthened, particularly within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and was led by ASEAN.

By the Eleventh Congress in 2011, after ten years of international economic integration, Vietnam experienced a significant shift in its thinking, transitioning from *international economic integration* to *proactive and active international integration*, which means broadening the scope, fields, and nature of integration. On April 10, 2013, the Politburo issued Resolution No. 22-NQ/TW on International Integration. This strategic document unified the understanding of international integration in the new situation, and defined objectives, guiding perspectives, and directions for Vietnam's international integration in the upcoming period.

### Box 1: Some Resolutions and Directives on International Cooperation and Integration

*Resolution No. 22-NQ/TW (2013)* of the Politburo on International Integration: provides orientation for international integration activities, particularly in the economic field, to promote sustainable development and enhance national status.

*Resolution No. 06-NQ/TW (2016)* of the Politburo on effectively implementing the international economic integration process and maintaining political-social stability in the context of Vietnam's participation in new-generation free trade agreements: outlines specific tasks and solutions to capitalise on opportunities from new-generation free trade agreements, ensuring political and social stability during the integration process.

*Resolution 93/NQ-CP (2023)*: of the Government on enhancing the effectiveness of international economic integration, promoting rapid and sustainable economic development from 2023 to 2030.

*Directive 15/CT-TTg (2014)*: of the Government on strengthening international integration efforts in the new context: emphasises leveraging opportunities from international integration to promote socio-economic development, safeguard national security, and enhance Vietnam's international position.

*Directive 25/CT-TTg (2018)*: of the Government on promoting and enhancing the effectiveness of international cooperation: focuses on improving the effectiveness of international cooperation activities, particularly in economics, education, science and technology, and defence.

*Directive 38/CT-TTg (2020)*: of the Government on strengthening foreign affairs and international integration efforts in the new context: proposes specific measures to enhance foreign affairs, promote international integration, and protect national interests amidst a volatile international situation.

The Fourth Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee issued Resolution No. 06-NQ/TW on November 5, 2016, *On Effectively Implementing the International Economic Integration Process and Maintaining Political-Social Stability in the context of Vietnam's Participation in New Generation Free Trade Agreements*. The resolution aims to maintain political-social stability, enhance the economy's autonomy, expand markets, attract additional capital, technology, knowledge, and management experience, ensure rapid and sustainable development, improve people's living standards; preserve and promote national cultural identity; uphold independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity; and enhance Vietnam's prestige and position on the international stage (Central Committee of The Communist Party of Vietnam).

The Thirteenth Party Congress in 2021 outlined:

"Consistently implementing an independent, self-reliant, peaceful, friendly, cooperative, and developmental foreign policy, with diversification and multilateralization of foreign relations. Ensuring the highest national interests based on the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, equality, cooperation, and mutual benefit. Combining national strength with the power of age, proactively and actively integrating into the world widely and deeply." (Vietnam's Communist Party 2021, 161–162)

## 3. International Cooperation Policy and Practical Implementation

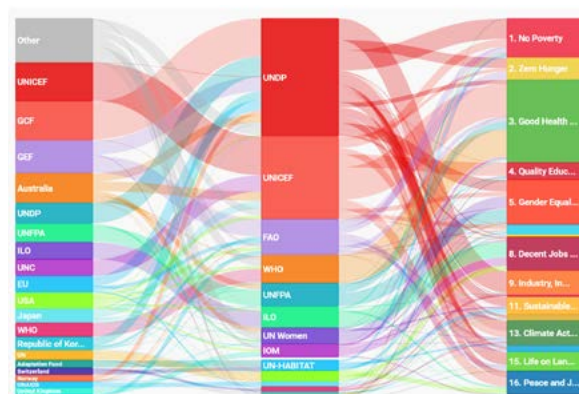
Vietnam's international cooperation policy is built on the fundamental principles of socialism, aiming to achieve socio-economic development, maintain regional peace and stability, and enhance the country's position on the international stage. These policies are flexible and adaptable to the international context while always upholding the core principles of national interests, sovereignty protection, and sustainable development. Vietnam's international cooperation policy is reflected in specific areas as follows.

### In the Field of Politics and Diplomacy

With the policy of multilateralizing and diversifying international relations, Vietnam aims to expand its relations with all countries in the world, regardless of political regime or ideology. Vietnam does not rely on any single country or group of countries but establishes relations with various partners, from major powers to smaller countries, from developed to developing regions.

In bilateral relations, Vietnam strengthens friendly and comprehensive cooperation with neighbouring countries, strategic partners, and countries of economic, political, and security significance.





International Donors, Agencies and Target Areas in Vietnam  
Source: <https://vietnam.un.org/en/sdgs>

Within multilateral frameworks, Vietnam actively participates in international and regional organisations such as the United Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), etc, and also engages in collective international efforts to address global and regional challenges.

### In the Field of Economics

After implementing the Renovation (Doi Moi) policy in 1986, Vietnam made significant progress in opening up and integrating into the global economy. This policy particularly focused on trade and investment sectors to promote economic growth, enhance the nation's position, and improve people's living standards. Essentially, Vietnam's economic cooperation and integration involved opening up and linking its economy with the regional and global economies.

#### Period 1986–1995

In trade, Vietnam gradually opened its markets, reduced trade barriers such as import-export taxes and restrictive regulations and encouraged both state-owned and private enterprises to engage in export activities, focusing on sectors where Vietnam had competitive advantages, such as agriculture, fisheries, and textiles. In investment, the promulgation of the Foreign Investment Law in 1987 provided a legal foundation for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Industrial zones and export processing zones began to be developed. The investment environment was gradually improved by simplifying administrative procedures, ensuring investor rights, and protecting intellectual property rights.

#### Period 1995–2006

Vietnam's accession to ASEAN in 1995 and the adoption of the policy of international economic integration, as affirmed in the documents of the 8th National Congress of the Communist Party, marked the beginning of deep economic integration for the country. During this period, Vietnam signed several Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) within the ASEAN framework and carried out legal and policy reforms in preparation for joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In investment, several preferential policies were introduced for foreign investors, particularly in high-tech and infrastructure sectors. In 2005, the National Assembly passed the Investment Law, which took effect on July 1, 2006, replacing the Foreign Investment Law and the Law on Domestic Investment Promotion. This change reflected the Vietnamese Party and State's interest in the foreign-invested economic sector, a crucial component of the economy.

#### Period 2007–2020

This period saw Vietnam's deep integration into the regional and global economy. Joining the WTO helped Vietnam expand its export markets, especially into developed markets such as the United States, the European Union (EU), and Japan. Vietnam also signed numerous bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements. In investment, Vietnam continued to improve the business environment, enhancing transparency and the effectiveness of legal regulations. During this period, Vietnam introduced policies encouraging investment in strategic sectors such as information technology, renewable energy, and manufacturing.

#### The period from 2020 to present

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam made some adjustments in its trade policy to adapt to new conditions, promoting e-commerce and new forms of transactions. In investment, Vietnam has made great efforts to attract more investment into sustainable development sectors, including clean energy and green technology.

### In the Field of Defence and Security

#### Period 1986–1995

Entering the period of renovation (Doi Moi), Vietnam experienced a shift in its defence thinking, moving from traditional defence to cooperation, dialogue, and joint development. During this period, Vietnam established and expanded defence relations with

## Vietnam – Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

### ❖ Signed and Effective



International Donors, Agencies and Target Areas in Vietnam  
Source: <https://vietnam.un.org/en/sdgs>

several countries in the region and the world, focusing on cooperation in training, experience sharing, and strategic consultations.

#### Period 1995–2006

After joining ASEAN, Vietnam participated in defence and security cooperation activities within the ASEAN framework, such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). At the same time, Vietnam strengthened bilateral and multilateral defence dialogues, contributing to building trust and regional stability and cooperating to address non-traditional security issues.

#### Period 2007–2020

During this period, in addition to expanding economic cooperation and international integration, Vietnam also enhanced its international cooperation and integration in defence and security:

- Establishing strategic defence partnerships with major countries such as Russia, India, Japan, South Korea, the United States, and several European countries.
- Participating in multilateral military exercises, military exchanges, and cooperating in defence research and production.
- Strengthening cooperation in maritime security, including joint patrols, information sharing, and addressing non-traditional security challenges.

#### The period from 2020 to present

The COVID-19 pandemic and regional security developments have posed new challenges to defence and security policies. Some policies during this period include:

- Enhancing international cooperation in pandemic prevention, information sharing, and medical support.
- Strengthening international cooperation in cybersecurity, including sharing experiences, and technologies and improving cybersecurity protection capabilities.
- Enhancing self-reliance in defence while maintaining and expanding international cooperation in defence production and research.

### In the Fields of Science, Technology and Education & Training

After the implementation of the Renovation policy (Doi Moi) in 1986, Vietnam focused on developing science, technology, and education to promote socio-economic development and international integration. International cooperation policies in these three fields have played a significant role in enhancing Vietnam's capabilities and position on the global stage.



## VIETNAM ESTABLISHES COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH 7 COUNTRIES



Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships of Vietnam

Source: <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/which-countries-have-set-up-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-with-vietnam-2258550.html>

### Period 1986–1995

This period saw the expansion of international cooperation with establishing partnerships with international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and developed countries. Vietnam also sent students and researchers abroad for study and research, laying the foundation for implementing cooperation policies in science, technology, and education.

### Period 1995–2006

Vietnam's accession to ASEAN in 1995 opened new opportunities for regional cooperation in science, technology, and education. Vietnam participated in ASEAN's scientific and educational cooperation programmes, such as the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology (ASEAN COST). Vietnam cooperated with developed countries in technology transfer, particularly information technology, high-tech agriculture, and biotechnology. Additionally, Vietnam reformed its education system, updating curricula and teaching methods and learning from advanced educational models worldwide.

### Period 2007–2020

During this period, Vietnam promoted research and innovation activities through international cooperation, establishing joint laboratories and collaborative research projects. Vietnam also signed educational cooperation agreements with many countries, increased student and faculty exchanges, and developed international joint training programmes.

### The period from 2020 to present

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges and new opportunities for international cooperation in science, technology, and education. Vietnam strengthened international research and development (R&D) cooperation, particularly in healthcare and biotechnology, to respond to the pandemic. Additionally, Vietnam enhanced international cooperation in developing online education platforms and programmes to meet the demand for distance learning during the pandemic.

### Box 2: Several Government Decisions Related to International Cooperation

*Decision 182/QĐ-TTg (2014)* on the approval of the Comprehensive Strategy for International Integration to 2020 with a Vision to 2030: approved a comprehensive strategy for international integration to facilitate socio-economic development, strengthen national defence and security, and enhance the country's global position

*Decision 146/QĐ-TTg (2015)* on the approval of the Project *Strengthening Cooperation between Vietnam and International Organisations*: aimed to enhance Vietnam's cooperation with international organisations, promote the implementation of international commitments, and increase the effectiveness of development cooperation.

*Decision 879/QĐ-TTg (2016)* on the approval of the Project *Strengthening International Cooperation in Science and Technology to 2020*: outlined specific goals and measures to promote international cooperation in science and technology, to improve Vietnam's research and technological application capabilities.

*Decision 200/QĐ-TTg (2017)* on the approval of the *Government Action Programme on International Economic Integration*: aimed to strengthen international economic integration, capitalise on opportunities from free trade agreements, and promote domestic economic reforms.

*Decision 522/QĐ-TTg (2018)* on the approval of the Project *Strengthening International Cooperation in Education and Training to 2025*: This decision focused on enhancing international cooperation in education and training to improve the quality of education and develop a high-quality workforce.

*Decision 1196/QĐ-TTg (2019)* on the approval of the National Action Plan to implement the 2030 agenda for sustainable development: aimed to implement the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including specific measures to promote international cooperation in sustainable development.

### In the Field of Environment and Climate Change

#### Period 1986–1995

This period marked the establishment of the legal framework for environmental protection activities, with the enactment of fundamental environmental protection laws and regulations, such as the Environmental Protection Law in 1993. Vietnam also began initial cooperation with international organisations like the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to receive technical and financial support.

#### Period 1995–2006

During this period, Vietnam signed and participated in international environmental conventions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol. Vietnam also engaged in ASEAN environmental initiatives and programmes, such as the ASEAN Environmental Action Plan. Additionally, the country implemented international cooperation projects for environmental protection and natural resource management, receiving technical and financial support from international organisations and developed countries.

#### Period 2007–2020

During this period, Vietnam continued to enhance its involvement in global climate efforts through the development and implementation of the National Target Programme on Climate Change Response (2008), participated in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2015, and committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions while strengthening adaptation measures. Vietnam also increased cooperation with developed countries and international organisations in clean technology transfer and capacity building to respond to climate change.

#### Period 2020 to present

Vietnam's international cooperation priorities in the environmental field during this period include the implementation of the National Action Plan on Climate Change Response for 2021–2030, supported by international organisations and development partners. Vietnam has also focused on enhancing international cooperation to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly those related to the environment and climate. Additionally, Vietnam has been promoting environmental protection measures and climate change mitigation as part of post-pandemic recovery, including the development of renewable energy and green technology.





Delegates of the APEC Economic Leaders' Week, 2017

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:APEC\\_Economic\\_Leaders%27\\_Week.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:APEC_Economic_Leaders%27_Week.jpg)

## 4. Achievements

### In Politics and Diplomacy

The implementation of expanding foreign relations has helped Vietnam break the blockade and embargo imposed by hostile forces, creating a favourable international environment for national construction and defence. Currently, Vietnam maintains diplomatic relations with over 190 countries and has established comprehensive strategic partnerships with seven of the world's leading powerful countries, including Russia, China, India, South Korea, Japan, the United States, and Australia. These partnership frameworks help connect Vietnam with these countries to address a range of common challenges while also contributing to achieving Vietnam's economic and social development goals.

International cooperation and diplomacy have significantly mobilised external resources to advance industrialisation, modernisation, and socio-economic development. Vietnam is an active and responsible member of more than 70 important regional and global international organisations and forums, such as the United Nations (UN), ASEAN, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and more (Nguyen Phu Trong 2023, 33).

In global politics, Vietnam has made significant marks and demonstrated itself as an active and responsible member of the international community. Vietnam has been elected twice as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (terms 2008–2009 and 2020–2021) and twice as a member of the UN Human Rights Council (terms 2014–2016 and 2023–2025). Vietnam has successfully hosted and chaired several important international conferences, such as the Francophone Summit (1997), the ASEAN Summits (1998, 2010, and 2020), the ASEM Summit (2005), the APEC Summits (2006 and 2017), and more. Since 2014, Vietnam has sent officers and military units, as well as police officers, to participate in United Nations peacekeeping missions.

### In Economy

Vietnam has economic and trade relations with 230 countries and territories and is involved in over 500 bilateral and multilateral agreements (including 17 Free Trade Agreements). Compared to the early years of Doi Moi, Vietnam's total import-export turnover has reached nearly 800 billion US dollar, approximately 130 times higher. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has reached 440 billion US dollar, a 22-fold increase (Nguyen Phu Trong 2023, 34).

Table 1: Summary of Vietnam's FTAs to August 2023

No.	FTA	Status	Partners
<b>FTAs in Effect</b>			
1.	AFTA	In effect since 1993	ASEAN
2.	ACFTA	In effect since 2003	ASEAN, China
3.	AKFTA	<b>In effect since 2007</b>	<b>ASEAN, South Korea</b>
4.	AJCEP	In effect since 2008	ASEAN, Japan
5.	VJEPA	In effect since 2009	Vietnam, Japan
6.	<b>AIFTA</b>	<b>In effect since 2010</b>	<b>ASEAN, India</b>
7.	AANZFTA	In effect since 2010	ASEAN, Australia, New Zealand
8.	VCFTA	In effect since 2014	Vietnam, Chile
9.	VKFTA	In effect since 2015	Vietnam, South Korea
10.	VN-EAEU FTA	In effect since 2016	Vietnam, Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan
11.	CPTPP (Predecessor TPP)	In effect since December 30, 2018, effective in Vietnam from January 14, 2019	Vietnam, Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, United Kingdom (signed accession protocol on July 16, 2023)
12.	AHKFTA	Effective in Hong Kong (China), Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam since June 11, 2019; Fully effective with all member countries from February 12, 2021	ASEAN, Hong Kong (China)
13.	EVFTA	In effect since August 1, 2020	Vietnam, EU (27 members)
14.	UKVFTA	Temporarily effective from January 1, 2021; Officially effective from May 1, 2021	Vietnam, the United Kingdom
15.	RCEP	In effect since January 1, 2022	ASEAN, China, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand
16.	VIFTA	Negotiations started in December 2015; Completed in April 2023; Officially signed on July 25, 2023	Vietnam, Israel
<b>FTAs under Negotiation</b>			
17.	Vietnam-EFTA FTA	Negotiations started in May 2012	Vietnam, EFTA (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein)
18.	ASEAN-Canada	Negotiations restarted in November 2012	ASEAN, Canada
19.	Vietnam-UAE FTA	Currently in the process of initiating negotiations	Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Source: Center for WTO and International Trade



Economic growth in 2021 was 2.56 per cent, while many economies worldwide experienced negative growth. In 2022, economic growth reached 8.02 per cent, making Vietnam one of the fastest-growing economies compared to countries in the region and the globe. For the first time, Vietnam's GDP exceeded 400 billion US dollar, placing it among the world's top 40 largest economies (Nguyen Phu Trong 2023, 34).

*In Defence and Security*

Since implementing the Doi Moi policy in 1986, Vietnam has achieved significant accomplishments in foreign defence. These results have enhanced the country's defence capabilities and helped strengthen peace, stability, and cooperation in the region and worldwide.

Vietnam has normalised defence relations with many countries, notably establishing defence relations with the United States after normalising diplomatic relations in 1995. Vietnam has established and expanded strategic and comprehensive defence partnerships with countries including Russia, India, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN countries. Vietnam has collaborated with various countries on defence technology transfer, improving production capabilities, and achieving self-reliance in defence industries. International cooperation in military training and education has helped enhance the abilities and skills of the Vietnamese armed forces.

Vietnam has also participated in and contributed to multilateral defence and security cooperation mechanisms, such as ASEAN-related mechanisms (ADMM+, ARF).

*In other Fields*

International cooperation in other fields has also positively contributed to enhancing Vietnam's role and position on the international stage, promoting the country's image and achievements to the global community. Vietnam has been involved in addressing various international issues, proposing reasonable initiatives and solutions based on international law, which have been supported and highly regarded by the international community.

Integration in culture, labour, social welfare, healthcare, education, training, science and technology has increasingly developed both in breadth and depth, with diverse forms, methods, partners, and improvements in quality. Bilaterally, Vietnam has signed numerous agreements and cooperation treaties based on common standards, such as those on preserving and promoting cultural and artistic values, labour, resource,

and environmental agreements, and enhancing the capacity of organisations and individuals in healthcare, education, science, and technology.

Multilaterally, Vietnam has actively contributed to building the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, promoting integration across all areas of the Community. At the same time, Vietnam is deeply involved in regional and global multilateral institutions and forums, primarily within the United Nations system, including organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); the World Health Organisation (WHO); and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), etc.

Overall, education, training, healthcare, science, and technology integration play a crucial role in developing the country's human resources, particularly high-quality ones. It also contributes to advancing the national scientific, educational, and healthcare systems, making them more modern and advanced and moving forward to narrowing the development gap with the region and the world in these sectors (Vietnam Government 2013).

Meanwhile, international cooperation in the field of natural resources and the environment has contributed to promoting environmental protection activities in Vietnam, such as mobilising capital, enhancing scientific and technological capabilities in the field of natural resources and environment, adopting modern methodologies and learning from the experiences of other countries in environmental management.

**5. Limitations and Policy Recommendations**

Despite significant achievements, Vietnam's international cooperation activities still face limitations and challenges.

*First*, some areas of Vietnam's international cooperation lack clear, long-term development strategies, leading to inefficient exploitation of cooperation opportunities. Priorities in international cooperation have not been clearly defined, resulting in inappropriate allocation of resources and efforts.

*Second*, relationships with certain partners, including strategic partners, have not been deepened enough, and obstacles still limit the comprehensive exploration of cooperation potential. The effectiveness of international cooperation and integration is still not commensurate with the potential, and the full benefits of cooperation and integration have not been fully realised.

*Third*, awareness and capacity for international cooperation and integration are uneven among departments, ministries, localities, and the public. The implementation of international agreements that Vietnam has participated in is slow due to a lack of strict oversight or timely specification. The personnel training for international cooperation and integration has not yet met practical requirements.

*Fourth*, infrastructure and technical capacity are not synchronised. Infrastructure in some regions of Vietnam remains outdated, making it difficult to attract investment and implement international cooperation projects. Vietnam's industries and scientific and technological fields lack advanced technology and high-level expertise, limiting the ability to cooperate and adopt technology from foreign partners.

To overcome these limitations, Vietnam needs to continue improving infrastructure, enhancing the quality of human resources, strengthening management and coordination capacities, and clearly defining directions and international cooperation strategies. Special attention should be paid to Improving infrastructure and technical capabilities to support international cooperation, especially in highly specialised fields such as science and technology, environment, and climate change.

Addressing these limitations will help Vietnam better take advantage of international cooperation opportunities and enhance the effectiveness of its cooperation activities, contributing to sustainable socio-economic development. This will strengthen the foundation for implementing an independent, self-reliant, diversified, and multilateral foreign policy, and position Vietnam as a responsible member of the international community, striving for peace, cooperation, and human progress.

In the future, the domestic and international environment will continue to undergo profound changes, affecting Vietnam's international cooperation and integration activities. Changes in conditions, driving forces, and cooperation and integration process will occur. Therefore, it is important to regularly review, evaluate, and timely draw lessons from experiences, as well as forecast and plan to further enhance the effectiveness of Vietnam's international cooperation activities.

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## Policy Implementation in the Public Sphere

● Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang

### 1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, Vietnam has been undergoing significant political, economic, cultural, and social transformations. Since the implementation of the *Doi Moi Policy* (Innovation Policy) in 1986, Vietnam has shifted from a centrally planned economy with state subsidies to a socialist-oriented market economy. This transformation has enabled the country to achieve remarkable economic growth and significantly improved people's lives.

A stable political environment, along with flexible economic policies, has created favourable conditions for Vietnam to integrate significantly into the global economy. Policies aimed at poverty reduction, attracting foreign investment, developing infrastructure, and improving workforce quality, among others, have contributed to the country's sustainable economic development. These policies shape the national direction and are key to achieving socio-economic development goals. Effective policy implementation helps ensure the rational allocation of resources, minimise social inequality, and enhance the quality of life for the population. At the same time, it also strengthens public confidence in the government, thereby laying the foundation for the country's sustainable development.

However, apart from successfully implemented policies, some policies have faced difficulties and challenges in the implementation. The question arises of how the public can better accept public policies. This study addresses three specific objectives:

- *First*, to systematise the concepts of public policy, policy implementation, and public sphere.
- *Second*, to clarify the discussions on policy implementation in VnExpress, the most widely read Vietnamese-language online newspaper, over a one-year period from May 2023 to May 2024, identifying which policies were mentioned and the public discussions surrounding them.
- *Third*, to highlight factors that influence the effectiveness of policy implementation from the public's perspectives.

The research methods used include document analysis, content analysis of 135 articles in the VnExpress online newspaper with the keywords *policy* and *policy implementation*, and case study research. These methods were employed to study VnExpress discussions and examine certain successful or unsuccessful policies, as discussed by its readers.



## 2. Public Policy, Policy Implementation, and Public Sphere

Public policy is a term commonly used in the media. Up to now, there have been various perspectives on public policy. This article defines public policy as

“Public policy is a set of interrelated decisions issued by the state, including objectives and solutions to address a public issue to achieve development goals.” (Le Nhu Thanh/Le Van Hoa 2016, 10)

There are various ways to categorise public policy, such as by the level of issuance (central or local policies), by sector (economic policies, science and technology, education, healthcare, security and defence, natural resources and environment policies, etc.), by duration (long-term, medium-term, short-term policies), by the nature of the response (proactive or reactive policies), and so on. To provide a clearer understanding and facilitate discussions on policy implementation and evaluation, this article categorises policies by sector.

There are different ways to divide a public policy procedure. It can be divided into three stages: policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Alternatively, it can be divided into four stages: agenda setting; planning and organising implementation; policy implementation; and policy monitoring and evaluation. Another way divides a public policy procedure into five stages: agenda setting; policy drafting; policy decision-making; policy implementation; and policy evaluation.

Policy implementation is a stage in the public policy procedure that aims to turn policy from theory into practice. It involves bringing public policy into social life by issuing documents, programmes, and projects and organising their execution to realise their objectives. There have been certain gaps between the government’s efforts through political programmes (laws and regulations) and their actual impact, which this study discusses by examining the discourse on policy implementation in the public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas, the initiator of the *public sphere* theory, conceptualises the public sphere as an arena independent of the government, “coexisting with public authority,” and possessing an autonomous quality concerning economic and political factions. It is a space designed for rational debate (that is,

debates and discussions about *interests, concealment, or manipulation*) and is fully open to citizen oversight. It is within this space that public opinion is formed. Habermas also emphasises that:

“The media are particularly important for constructing and maintaining a public sphere. The media act as players in the fields of public politics,” and “there are two types of actors without whom no field of public politics can function: experts in communication systems and experts in politics.” (Habermas 1962, trans. 1989)

However, Habermas also observes that not all the public participates in social discussions; only a small segment participates.

The process of discussion in the public sphere of online newspapers, in addition to the basic characteristics proposed by Habermas, also has its distinct features:

- *First*, it is a virtual space, making ensuring personal accountability for opinions challenging.
- *Second*, although participants discuss in the public sphere, they remain distinct individuals.
- *Third*, although the discussions cover many topics, they are limited to the proposed initial topic.
- *Fourth*, although it is a public forum, the discussion space in online newspapers is always guided by an opinion leader through one or more orienting articles, typically the journalist. This characteristic shows that the public sphere of online newspapers is an open space within a certain orientation (Phan Van Kien 2023).

In recent years, Vietnam’s media has effectively fulfilled its role in providing information, disseminating, and promoting the content of government policies, conveying to the public experiences and realities to help them better understand the policies being implemented by the country:

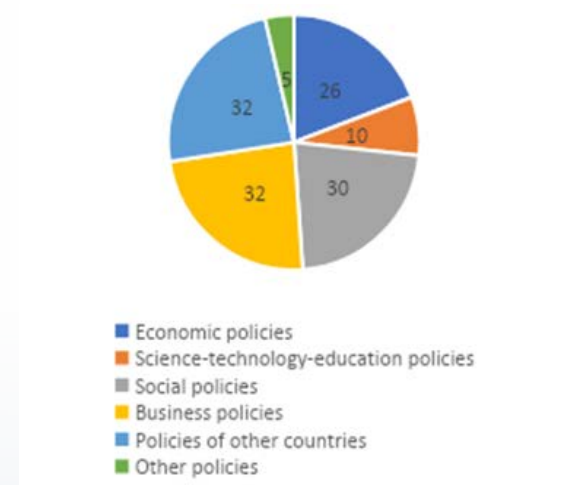
“The use of media in the policy cycle stages to build social consensus and regulate public opinion is increasingly emphasised.” (Academy of Journalism and Communication et al. 2018). Issues such as *Policy communication and public reception capacity*, *Policy communication technology in the 4.0 era* and *Policy communication in the context of digital transformation and international integration* have also been researched (Academy of Journalism and Communication 2019; 2022; 2023).

However, in Vietnam, in addition to a few articles such as *Interdisciplinary Approaches in Public Sphere Research* (Trinh Van Tung 2020) discussing public sphere research and *Public Discussion on Public Policy in Online Newspapers* (Phan Van Kien 2023), there are very few studies addressing the implementation of policies in public spheres. This article will focus on clarifying the discussion on policy implementation in the public sphere, specifically in VnExpress, and factors influencing the effectiveness of public policy implementation from the public’s perspectives.

## 3. Discussion on the Implementation of Policies in VnExpress

To explore policy communication and discussion on the implementation of public policies in VnExpress, the author used the keywords *policy* and *policy implementation* and found 135 articles within one year, from May 2023 to May 2024, that directly addressed policy implementation in Vietnam. The specific data is as follows:

Figure 1: Number of articles discussing policies in VnExpress (May 2023 until May 2024)



Source: The author

However, out of the total 135 articles, 32 articles introduced the policies of businesses, which are not public policies, and 32 articles discussed the policies of other countries, such as those of the US, Europe, and China, which are not the focus of this paper. Therefore, the article only deals with analysing 71 articles about public policies in specific areas, as mentioned above, and 1,041 reader comments related to these articles.

Among the total articles on public policies, social policy is the most discussed (30/71 articles), followed by economic policy (26/71), then science, technology, and education policies (10/71), and only 5/71 articles on foreign policy, national security, and defence. Even pressing issues like environmental policy are discussed in only four articles, focusing on environmental policies related to the green economy and sustainable development. On the first day of each month, VnExpress typically publishes a summary article titled *Prominent policies effective from...* that mentions four to five key policies taking effect that month. To ensure accurate statistics, this study counts each summary article as one policy communication article. However, summarising the twelve articles on prominent policies effective from May 2023 to May 2024, 58 policies were mentioned, meaning that at least 129 public policies were reflected in the VnExpress from May 2023 to May 2024.

### Social policies receive the most attention and discussion

Social policies discussed here include welfare and benefits, poverty reduction policies, social security, social insurance, and unemployment insurance. Vietnam has allocated 20 per cent of its total state budget to social policies. In the survey conducted from May 2023 to May 2024, there were up to 30 over 71 articles discussing social policies in VnExpress. These are also the articles that received the most interaction from readers.

Specifically, the article with the most reader comments was *Proposal to Limit One-Time Withdrawal of Social Insurance* (VnExpress June 30, 2023), with 306 reader comments. The article reported that the Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly proposed studying an amendment to the Social Insurance Law to restrict and eventually end one-time withdrawals of social insurance while still of working age. Previously, Article 60 of the Social Insurance Law 2014 stipulated that employees could not receive one-time social insurance payments after leaving employment and had to wait until retirement age; during this time, they could



receive unemployment benefits, job counselling, and accumulate years of contributions if they continued to participate. This regulation led many employees to protest and engage in collective strikes. The government later proposed that the National Assembly develop Resolution 93 to amend the regulations, allowing employees to choose between a one-time social insurance payout or deferring it if conditions permitted. However, this policy created a wave of one-time social insurance withdrawals.

With 306 reader comments, this reflects the public's opinions on the issue of one-time social insurance withdrawals. Most comments express people's concerns and anxiety, explaining why they feel the need to make a one-time withdrawal from social insurance:

"One-time withdrawals of social insurance are mostly by older employees who have been laid off by factories and cannot find new employment. They struggle to make these withdrawals to have capital for future sustenance. Their money should be returned to them; why should it be restricted?"

"Withdrawing burdens those who run out of money over the years. If employees' money is held back, who will bear the burden of their living expenses during those difficult years?"

"Allow employees to decide for themselves what to do with their own money."

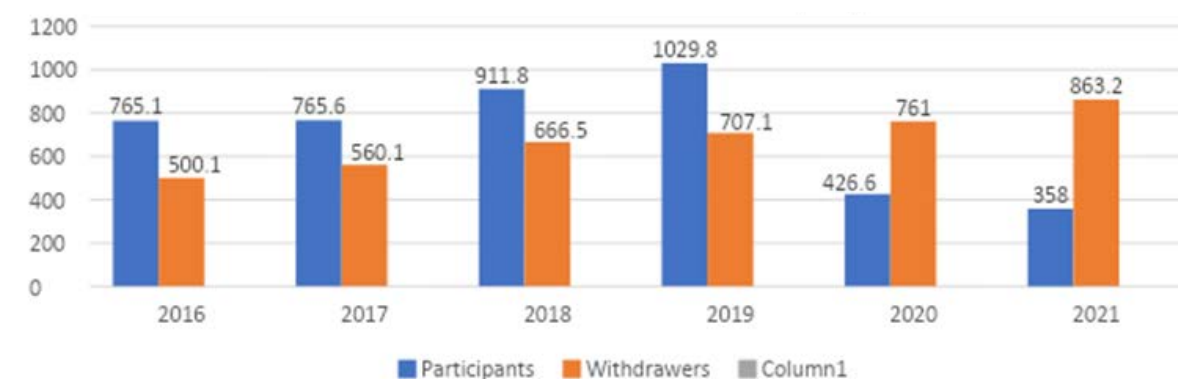
"The issue of employment needs to be addressed. Employees need jobs to stay within the social insurance system," (VnExpress June 30, 2023)

The comments show that the number of people supporting one-time social insurance withdrawals far exceeds those who agree with the policy restricting such withdrawals. This indicates that policymakers need to reconsider.

"There are hundreds of reasons for people to make one-time withdrawals, to withdraw before retirement age, if restrictions are not in place. If we want to have a social insurance fund that can support all the elderly and disabled and ensure that in the future no elderly or disabled people are left without pensions or benefits, we need to change the social insurance policy." (VnExpress June 30, 2023)

It can be seen in the chart that the number of people withdrawing one-time social insurance benefits has steadily increased each year, from 500,100 people in 2016 to over 863,200 people in 2021. From 2019 to 2021, due to the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of those withdrawing one-time social insurance did so because of job loss and income difficulties. However, the number of people withdrawing one-time social insurance was more than twice the number of people participating in social insurance in a given year, an alarming number. The article also provides data:

Figure 2: Workers participating in and number of people withdrawing on-time social insurance benefits (2016–2021)



Source: The author

"In summary of seven years of implementing Resolution 93, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs reports that during 2016–2022, the entire country had nearly 4.85 million people withdraw one-time social insurance benefits. Almost 1.3 million returned to the system when they continued to work and contributed to social insurance (26 per cent). On average, for one and a half people joining the social safety net, one person leaves the system." (VnExpress June 30, 2023)

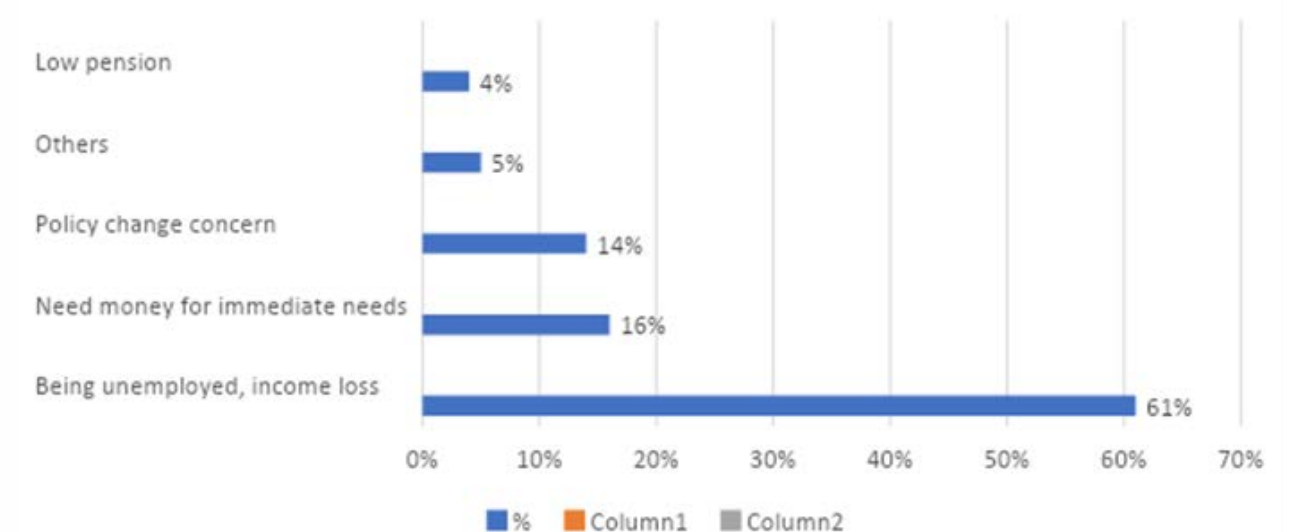
In the report to the Prime Minister on May 30, 2023, Private Economic Development Research Board (Board IV) observed that the trend of withdrawing one-time social insurance benefits has not ceased due to the "wave of personnel reductions extending through the end of this year." The Board recommended allowing employees to use their social insurance benefits as collateral for short-term consumer loans when their income is unstable. The Ministry of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs stated that they would submit both withdrawal options to the government and seek the National Assembly's opinions: either maintaining the current system or only paying out 50 per cent of the total contribution period, with the remaining portion retained in the system for future benefits. By the end of 2022, the Social Insurance Fund reached 1.2 trillion Vietnamese dong, with over 17.2 million participants, covering nearly 38 per cent of the working-age population (VnExpress June 30, 2023).

This issue continued to heat up in the media when the National Assembly discussed the policy on withdrawing one-time social insurance in November 2023. One of the articles with high reader interaction, receiving 106 comments, was

"Today, the National Assembly discusses the policy on withdrawing one-time social insurance." (VnExpress November 23, 2023)

The Vietnamese Government presented two options to the National Assembly: maintaining the current regulations for employees with social insurance contributions made before the law takes effect or allowing partial withdrawal but not exceeding 50 per cent of the total time contributed to the retirement and death benefit fund. The Social Affairs Committee noted that some opinions disagreed with both options, arguing that the first option would create inequality and risk a surge in one-time withdrawals, and the second option of allowing 50 per cent withdrawal was deemed unreasonable as it concerns *the employees money*, and the drafting agency has yet to explain the rationale behind the 50 per cent rate. As this is a complex and sensitive issue affecting employees' rights and long-term social welfare, the Committee suggested that the Vietnamese Government review and carefully consider additional options as a basis for further consultation with the National Assembly.

Figure 3: Reasons why employees withdraw one-time social insurance



Source: Private Economic Development Research Board (Board IV). VnExpress, June 30, 2023

107 reader comments continued to deeply discuss issues such as

"If there's no job, where will the money come from to pay?"

"If I can't find a job, where will the money come from to pay voluntarily?"

"In my opinion, the benefits should be proportional to the number of years contributed, and there should not be a minimum number of years required to avoid the situation of one-time withdrawal."

"The current Social Insurance Law has limitations and needs to be revised to attract people to participate in social insurance in a long-term, sustainable manner, ensuring practical benefits for those participating in social insurance."

On June 29, 2024, the National Assembly passed the revised Social Insurance Law, with 454 out of 465 delegates voting in favour (accounting for 93.42 per cent of the total number of National Assembly delegates). The law will take effect on July 1, 2025. The National Assembly agreed that employees who have made social insurance contributions before the revised Social Insurance Law takes effect, and after twelve months of not participating in compulsory or voluntary social insurance with a contribution period of less than 20 years, may request to withdraw their one-time social insurance. After the law takes effect, they can no longer withdraw one-time social insurance. Thus, the issues discussed by the public were taken into consideration by policymakers, and the revised Social Insurance Law has been adjusted compared to previous drafts.

*Science & technology and environmental policies have not received adequate attention.*

On the other hand, it is evident that science & technology and environmental policies have not received adequate attention. Only 10 out of 71 articles discussed science, technology, and education policies, and most readers disagreed with education policies. For example, the article *Prominent policies effective from February* (VnExpress February 1, 2024) had 20 out of 35 reader comments expressing concerns about the policy

"Schools can choose their textbooks," such as "Choosing textbooks is a headache. After selecting them, there was a shortage, and we had to use another set. For example, the textbook set *The Creative Horizons* lacks an IT textbook, so parents must buy the IT book from the Knowledge textbook set."

"Such education renovation has shown its limitations. We hope the agencies will reconsider..." "Prominent policies effective from March" (VnExpress March 1, 2024) had 23 out of 55 reader comments discussing the policy "A university fails to meet standards if the dropout rate exceeds 10 percent."

32 out of 55 comments deal with domestic airfare prices. Only four out of 71 articles discussed environmental policies, even though the issues are current and urgent.

#### 4. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Public Policy from the Public's Perspective

Based on public discussions, a question arises: what factors influence the implementation of public policy? There have been studies on the factors affecting the effectiveness of public policy implementation. Smith, in his article *Policy Implementation* (1973), argued that the factors influencing the effectiveness of public policy implementation include:

- The quality of the policy.
- The agency or organisation implementing the policy.
- The policy's target group.
- 4) Environmental factors.

The authors McLaughlin and Mibrey suggested that effective public policy implementation depends on factors such as

- The degree of consensus on needs and viewpoints between the policy implementers and the policy's target group.
- The level of interaction and information sharing on an equal basis between the policy implementers and the policy's target group.
- Flexibility in goals and implementation methods according to the changing environment of the policy implementers.
- The benefits and value orientation of the policy's target group (Nguyen Trong Binh 2020).

Through the articles on policy implementation in VnExpress and 1,041 reader comments, some prominent factors influencing policy implementation can be identified as follows:

*First* is the policy quality. This is a key factor in determining whether the policy implementation will be effective. The influence of policy quality on the effectiveness of policy implementation is reflected in two main aspects: the soundness, clarity and specificity of the policy. A sound policy aligns with objective laws and serves the public interest, promoting societal development. A sound policy is reflected in its content, methods, and formulation, which must be based on thorough theoretical and practical foundations. Additionally, the clarity and specificity of the policy are crucial, with realistic, measurable, and comparable goals. A lack of clarity and specificity can lead to difficulties in execution, affecting the effectiveness of policy implementation. For example, the policy on the implementation of the first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line in Hanoi was referred to as an *Insensitive Policy* by an expert from the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) (Dau Anh Tuan VnExpress, August 8, 2022), with 144 reader comments agreeing. Developing public transportation and encouraging people to use buses is essential in Vietnam. However, with the BRT policy, half of the lane is reserved for rapid buses, while the other half is crowded with regular buses, cars, and motorcycles, leading to much controversy:

"People cannot be crammed onto half the road, leaving the other half for a vehicle that only comes every ten minutes. The most frustrating thing is that since the rapid bus line began operating, all other public transport, like taxis and contract vehicles, have been banned from this road during morning and evening rush hours, totalling about six hours each day. As a result, on this road, there is a chaotic mix of motorbikes, cars, and buses; cars in the middle, surrounded by motorbikes. During rush hours, the rapid bus obviously cannot go fast. The policy's goal, therefore, has not been achieved."

This road has several overpasses, among the first overpasses in Hanoi. Since the rapid bus began, signs have prohibited motorbikes from using the overpasses during peak hours. However, since these signs were placed, there was likely never a moment when this rule was followed. The law exists, it is set out, but it is not obeyed, and that has become normal. Not only did citizens ignore the rules, but the government agencies also did not consider the side effects of law evasion." (Dau Anh Tuan VnExpress, August 8, 2022)

This is a typical example of an ineffective transportation policy in Vietnam. When issuing a policy, policymakers must consider its feasibility for public implementation, avoid creating opportunities for *law evasion*, prioritise people's interests, and consider the policy's potential side effects.

*Second*, resources for policy implementation. Whether policy implementation resources are sufficient is also a factor affecting the effectiveness of policy implementation. Policy implementation resources include financial, human (workforce), information, equipment resources, etc. Public opinions expressed in articles on policy implementation discussed these resources extensively, particularly financial, human, and information resources. For example, the article *34 million employees struggle to access social policies* (VnExpress March 22, 2024) asserts that

"Nearly 70 percent of employees of working age have not had employment information, making it difficult for them to access and benefit from social policies."

Readers also commented: "Lack of information and inaccurate information will complicate policy planning for the labour market," and "employees in companies are not fully aware of social insurance information and benefits, while self-employed employees face even greater difficulties."

*Third*, policy implementation entities. The public discussed the competence of the agencies or organisations responsible for policy implementation. The effectiveness of policy implementation is significantly influenced by whether policymakers are knowledgeable, well-versed in the policy, invest in its implementation, and are innovative and creative. Readers' comments highlighted that a lack of knowledge and necessary skills among policymakers and a lack of interaction and communication among stakeholders can reduce the effectiveness of policy implementation. Specifically, in the article *Evasive Policy* (VnExpress August 8, 2022), most of the 144 comments agreed with the author that the rapid bus transit (BRT) policy lacked public involvement in its planning, stating:

"There was no public input in the planning of this policy," "Poor adherence to traffic regulations is due to the authorities, not the public. It is an issue with traffic management," and "I've seen this BRT project discussed extensively since its inception until now. The public is certain that the BRT has more drawbacks than benefits, so why haven't the responsible agencies recognised this?"



Fourth, policy subjects (the subjects affected by the policy). The level of acceptance and support from policy subjects plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of policy implementation. If policy subjects accept and support a policy, its implementation will be smoother. Conversely, if they do not support the policy, the implementation will be challenging and may increase the costs of policy enforcement. A policy that benefits the target group or even has only a minor impact on them is usually well-received by its subjects, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the policy implementation. On the other hand, if policy subjects believe that the policy does not benefit or significantly affect them, they are likely to resist or obstruct its implementation. For example, when the Ministry of Transport adjusted the domestic airfare caps starting from March 1, 2024, right after that, 32 readers commented on it:

“The airfares are beyond my imagination,” “Airline tickets are too high compared to current income levels,” and “If prices increase, will delays decrease or also increase?”

Fifth, environmental factors, including economic, political, cultural, and social environment. A favourable environment will ensure effective policy implementation, while an unsuitable environment will hinder it. Nguyen Trong Binh has stated:

“If the economic level is advanced, especially in a developed market economy, the policy implementation agencies will have better conditions to attract resources for policy implementation; the level of cultural development and the public’s understanding will facilitate policy implementation, and vice versa; public opinions, the autonomy, and development of social organisations also affect policy implementation.” (Nguyen Trong Binh 2020)

5. Conclusion

Over the past years, the Vietnamese government has made significant efforts to implement policies effectively, for example policies on poverty reduction and public health.. However, certain transportation and environmental policies have faced difficulties and challenges in their implementation. An analysis of policy communication and public discussions in VnExpress from May 2023 to May 2024 reveals that social policies have garnered the most public interest and discussions, while policies related to science & technology and the environment have received less attention in the media and public discussions. As discussed by the public, factors affecting the effectiveness of policy implementation are focused on policy quality, implementation resources, policy implementers, policy subjects, and environmental factors such as political, economic, cultural, and social contexts. Discussions in the digital public sphere of online newspapers have the unique characteristic of being virtual, which makes it challenging to ensure personal accountability for opinions, even though the discussions involve individual participants. Discussions often revolve around the topics raised in the articles, and despite being public forums, the discussion space in online newspapers is often led by an *opinion leader*, such as a journalist or expert, indicating that the public sphere in online newspapers is open in its orientation. Whether policy implementation is effective or not is a combination of many factors, with key elements being the policy quality, policy implementers, and policy subjects (the affected groups).

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Reform. Improvement of Laws  
Source: iStock.com/Olivier Le Moal

## Administration Reform

● Vu Thi Anh Thu

### 1. Introduction

State administration reform is identified as one of the central missions regarding the progress of renovation, state development, and construction of the socialist state rule by law. Based on the policies about administration reform acknowledged in the Seventh to Thirteenth Congress Resolutions of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Vietnamese Government has promulgated three overall reform programs in three phases: 2001–2010, 2011–2020, and 2021–2030 with the common aim of constructing a democratic, professional, modern, streamlined, effective, efficient, constructively developable, transparent, and people-centred administration.

The main contents of the overall administration reform programs from 2001 to 2030 include the following major points:

institutional, administrative systematic organization, administrative procedure, civil service, and public finance reform, as well as administrative modernization (constructing and developing e-government and digital government).

Every overall administration reform program defines different specific missions that are suitable to the context and the necessity of each reform content at each phase (Government 2001; 2011; 2011b).

This article does not discuss in detail every aspect of administration reform in each phase. Moreover, based on published data and documents, this chapter exclusively provides an overview of reform objectives and the result of administration reforms in some fields and aspects, which influence one another, to which there is an evident change when it comes to a serving administration that has a positive impact on the society and the people. The 2021–2030 overall administration reform program is the inheritance and improvement of the achievements from the two previous programs while continuing to execute reform and complete the administration reform contents under the circumstance that Vietnam and other countries are in the digital transformation process. These contents of the 2021–2023 administration reform program are thus more attentively analysed. Besides, reports on the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI), Public Administration Reform Index (PAR Index), and Satisfaction Index of Public Administrative Services (SIPAS) conducted from 2020 to 2023 are reliable sources to affirm that administration reform in Vietnam has achieved worth-noting changes.





Why is a well-working administration so important?

Source: <https://www.sigmaweb.org/ourexpertise/strategic-framework-public-administration-reform.htm>

## 2. An Overview of Orientation and Objectives of Administration Reform

The three administration reform programs set orientations and objectives to achieve in each phase. There are six major aspects in overall:

*First*, institutional reform must be suitable to Vietnam's background in order to industrialize and modernize the country. Institutional reform in terms of developing a socialist-oriented market economy, synchronizing the organization and operation of the administrative system, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of state management and development creation capacity implementation is given priority. The legal framework for digital transformation has been completed to serve the development of digital government, digital economy, and digital society towards a modern service administration.

Several related legal documents have been requested to be reviewed for modification or new promulgation to fulfil this objective:

Law on Land, Law on Enterprises, Law on Construction, Law on Bankruptcy, Law on Competition, Law on Government Organization, Law on Local Government Organization, etc.

*Second*, administration reform must be in the direction of simplification and is executed in a digital environment, following the one-stop shop and interconnected one-stop shop mechanism, with the goal of achieving 80 per cent of procedures to

be integrated and delivered via the National Public Service Portal by 2025. The proportional figure of documentation at levels 3 and 4 is 50 per cent, which means that the transactions in the progress of submitting and processing digital documents and delivering services are operated in the cyber environment as users can make bill payments online (Ministry of Information and Communications 2017).

*Third*, state administration reform must be in the direction of clearly apportioning functions, missions, and authority; hierarchically classifying and decentralizing power between state bureaus; clearly apportioning the government models of rural areas, municipalities, islands, and special economic-administrative units; and leanly coordinating the system of public career units with reasonable structure and advanced efficiency. The goal is to achieve the 90 per cent minimum of people's and organization's satisfaction with the state administrative bureau's service by 2025 (Government 2021b).

*Fourth*, civil service reform in the direction of constructing professional, responsible, proactive, and competent public services, meeting the office, position, and ability framework in accordance with regulations by 2025.

*Fifth*, public finance reform in the direction of renovating the system of apportionment and use of state budgets for administrative bureaus and public career units attached to assigned missions and output products. Further promoting the restructuring of state-owned businesses and the renovation of the system of administering state funds in businesses. 100 per cent of economic career and other career units meet the conditions to complete the conversion to joint stock companies or to self-guaranteeing regular and investment expenses by 2025 (Government 2021b).

*Sixth*, constructing and developing e-government and digital government with the expectation that 100 per cent of national database, as a developing background for digital government, will be connected nationwide by 2025; 100 per cent of the Public Service Portal and digital one-door information system at ministerial and provincial levels will be connected and shared with National Public Service Portal; all people and businesses using online public services will be assigned identification and digital authorization thoroughly and are unified on all information systems of administration from central to local levels. Vietnam will join the leading 70 countries in terms of digital government (EGDI) (Government 2021b).

## 3. Results, and Measures for Further Reform

The results of administration reform are identified based on the administration reform indexes of the government, ministries, ministerial-level agencies, provincial People's Committees, and municipalities under the direct management of the central level, as well as the Satisfaction Index of Public Administrative Services. The Ministry of Home Affairs has done research for twelve years, from 2011 to 2023, on the PAR Index. The Ministry has also done surveys on people's satisfaction with the Satisfaction Index of Public Administrative Services (SIPAS) across 63 provinces and municipalities under the direct management of the central level for seven years, from 2016 to 2023. Moreover, from 2009 to 2023, UNDP coordinated with a few research centres to do surveys on people about the efficiency and quality of policy execution and the public service delivery of local government in 63 provinces and municipalities under the direct management of the Central level (PAPI).

The following chapter will present the reform results through the indexes of PAR, SIPAS, and PAPI in the three most recent years to indicate the change of the three administration reform programs throughout three phases. This chapter will focus on analysing the indexes of some major contents in the surveys.

### Public Administration Reform Index (PAR INDEX) — PAR Index at ministries and ministerial-level agencies

The measured administrative reform index includes seven components:

reform of direction and performance of the administrative reform; administrative systematic organization reform; institutional reform; civil service reform; administrative procedure reform; public finance reform; and building and developing E-government and digital government of ministries and ministerial-level agencies

The average value of total PAR Indexes of 17 ministries and ministerial-level agencies was rated at 86.07 per cent (2021), 84.05 per cent (2022), and 84.38 per cent (2023). 2022 was the first year to conduct assessments with a plethora of new criteria as well as component criteria in accordance with Resolution 876/QĐ-BNV (10/11/2022) to comply with the overall administration reform program 2021—2030; the 2022 PAR Index was therefore reduced by 2.02 per cent compared to 2021. In general, 14 out of 17 ministries and ministerial-level agencies were categorized in the group which achieved the PAR Index above 80 per cent — under 92 per cent; only three or four achieved above 70 per cent — under 80 per cent in the 2021—2023 period (Ministry of Home Affairs 2022b, 2023b, 2024b).

Table 1: Comparison of component indexes' average values in the 2021–2023 period

No.	Sub-Index	Average value in 2021 (%)	Average value in 2022 (%)	Average value in 2023 (%)
1	Direction and Administration Index	96.31	91.88	94.90
2	Institutional Reform Index	81.35	79.55	78.96
3	Administrative Procedure Reform Index	<b>85.96</b>	<b>89.04</b>	<b>82.14</b>
4	Institutional Reform Index	81.18	89.12	89.87
5	Civil Service Reform Index	85.11	86.17	90.49
6	<b>Public Financial Reform Index</b>	<b>84.94</b>	<b>74.92</b>	<b>78.47</b>
7	Constructing and Developing Digital Government, E-Government Index	90.83	78.45	78.35

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 1: Comparison of component indexes' average values in the 2021–2023 period



Source: PAR Index 2023 (Ministry of Home Affairs 2024b)

The above table shows that the index of constructing and developing e-government and digital government did not meet expectations. 2023 revealed that although 16 out of 17 ministries fulfilled the component criteria *Rate of whole online public service process* (94.12 per cent), only three ministries achieved maximum grade of the component criteria *Rate of whole online document process* (65.31 per cent), and eight ministries failed to achieve the maximum grade of the component criteria *Implementing digitalization on administration procedure process* (52.94 per cent) (Ministry of Home Affairs 2024b). These results are correlative to UNDP's survey on *E-governance* in four years, with respective grades: 2.77 (2020), 2.87 (2021), 3.01 (2022), and 3.18 (2023) on the scale of 10 (CECODES, RTA & UNDP 2024).

**Public Administration Reform Index (PAR INDEX)**  
— PAR Index at provincial and municipal state administration reform

PAR Index at provinces and municipalities is based on eight component criteria: consisting of seven component criteria of the ministries and the impact of administration reform on the people, organization and socio-economic development.

The above figure indicates the radical fluctuation of the average value of administration reform index at the local level. In the 2012–2015 period, the administration reform index gradually increased in the later years, around the difference level of 1.48 to 3.90 per cent. However, the 2016 index dropped (–10.47 per cent),

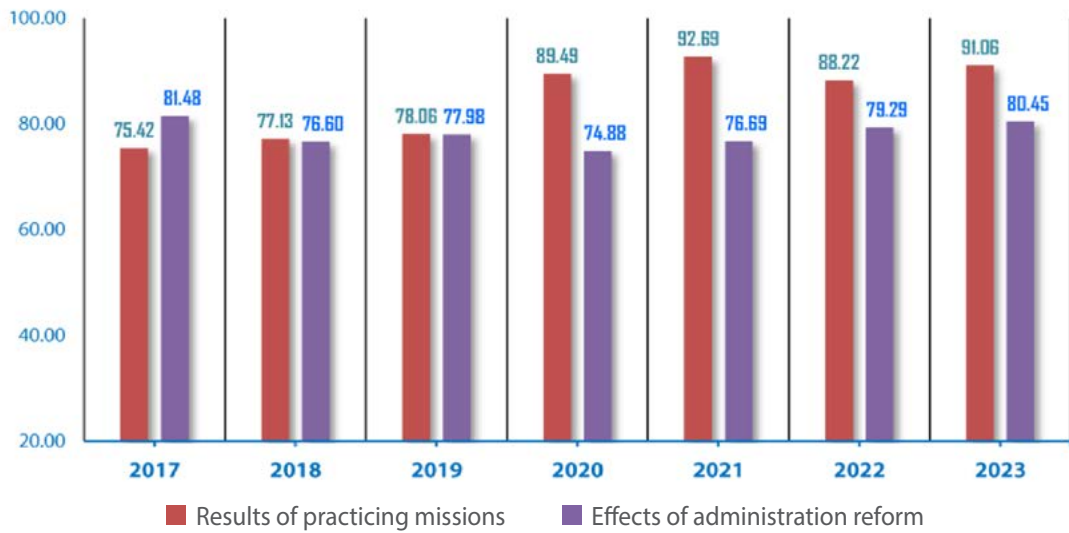
for this is the first year to identify administration reform index based on new criteria and standards; there is thus a difference in how the administration reform component indexes are measured (Ministry of Home Affairs 2016). In the following years from 2019 to 2023, the indexes had the tendency to increase gradually to above 80 per cent.

The rankings of the 2023 provincial and municipal PAR Index are divided to two groups:

- Group A: seven provinces and municipalities achieved the PAR Index greater or equal to 90 per cent (compared to only two provinces and municipalities of 2022).
- Group B: 56 provinces and municipalities achieved from 80 to below 90 per cent (compared to 56 provinces and municipalities achieving from 80 to below 90 per cent, and five achieving from 70 to below 80 per cent in 2022) (Ministry of Home Affairs 2023, 2024b).

The results in the 2017–2023 period reflect drastic guidance from the leaders and efforts of local administrative agencies in operating specific measures and removing institutional and policy obstacles to improve reform efficiency in every field, especially administrative procedure reform, civil service reform, and digital transition, collectively to improve public service delivery quality (Ministry of Home Affairs 2024b).

Figure 2: Comparison of the results of practicing administration reform missions and the results evaluating its effect from 2017 to 2023



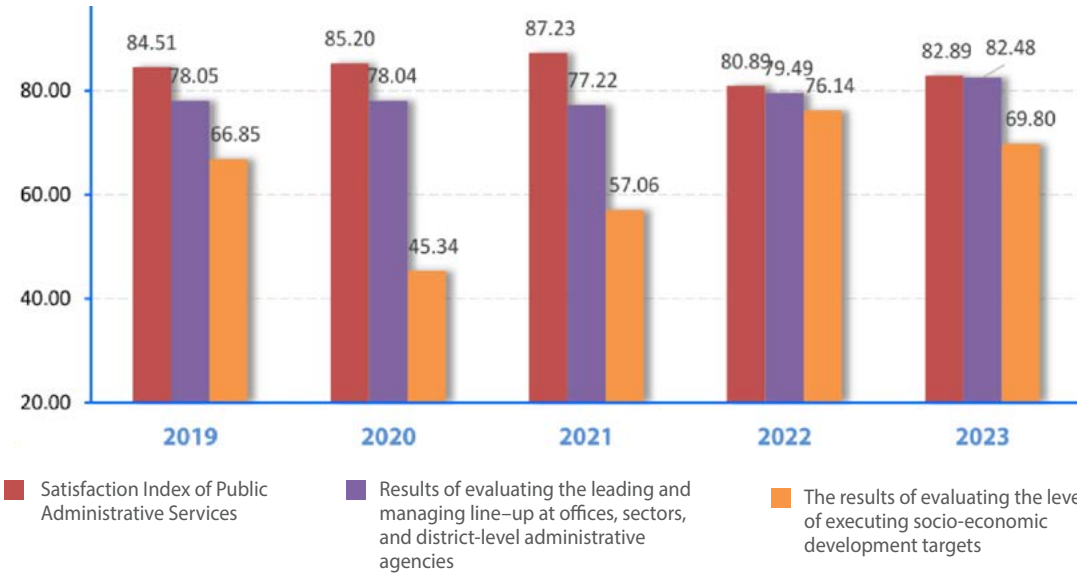
Source: PAR Index 2023 (Ministry of Home Affairs 2024b)

**4. Evaluating the Impact of Administration Reform**

The impact evaluation results of administration reform are based on:

- (The measured results of people's satisfaction with public administrative service.
- The survey results of evaluating the leading and managing line-up at offices, sectors, and district-level administrative agencies.
- The results of evaluating the level of executing socio-economic development targets.

Figure 3: Comparison of the results of criteria groups evaluating administration reform's impact on regions from 2019 to 2023



Source: PAR Index 2023 (Ministry of Home Affairs 2024b)



The survey results about Satisfaction Index of Public Administrative Services (SIPAS) indicate that people’s satisfaction with the country’s service accessibility in the 2019–2022 period always reached above 80 per cent. The average satisfaction rate with service accessibility assesses four categories: state agencies providing information in a way that is diverse, accessible, and intuitive; state agencies’ headquarters having clear nameplates and instructions in sight; clean and civilized state agencies’ headquarters; fully equipped with good quality to better handle tasks (Home of Ministry Affairs 2023a). People’s satisfaction with nationwide state administrative agencies’ service in 2023 registered at

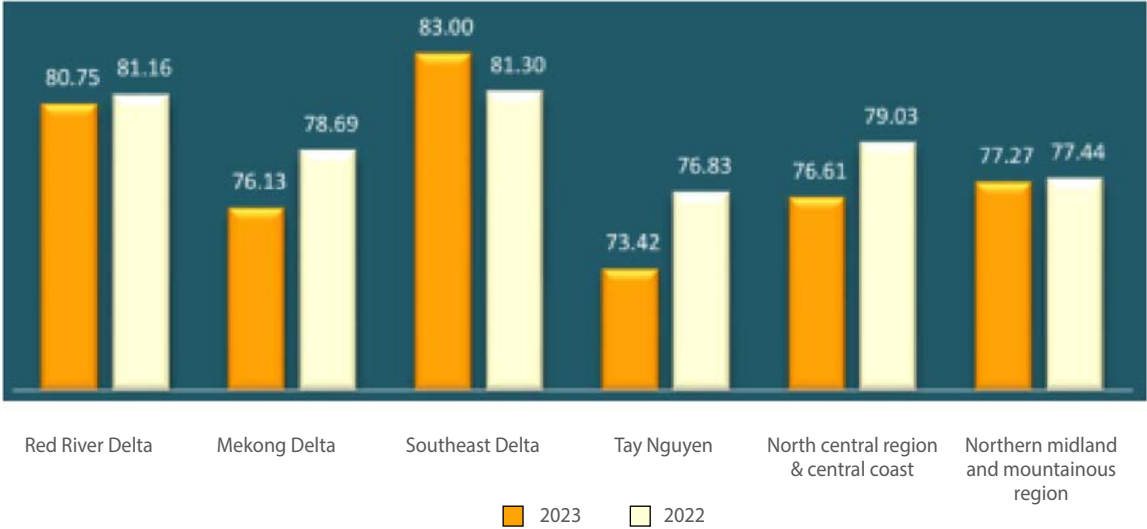
82.66 per cent (increased by 1.88 per cent compared to 2022). Satisfaction with state administrative agencies’ service in 63 provinces and municipalities is between 75.03 and 90.61 per cent. 49 out of 63 achieved a grade above 80 per cent. Besides, the indexes of people’s expectation for ten contents needed to improve are between 83.44 and 85.12 per cent, as the people want more improvement on staff’s attitude in terms of handling their tasks (85.12 per cent); improvement on the quality of receiving and processing people’s petitions (85.11 per cent); and improvement on staff’s competence in handling their tasks (83.03 per cent) (Home of Ministry Affairs 2024a).

Table 2: Satisfaction with governance efficiency 2021–2023

Dimension and Sub-Dimension	Scale		National Mean Over Time (2020–2023)			
	Min	Max	PAPI 2020	PAPI 2021	PAPI 2022	PAPI 2023
Participation at Local Levels	1	10	4.78	4.71	4.97	4.88
Transparency in Local Decision-Making	1	10	5.28	5.19	5.25	5.12
Accountability Towards Citizens	1	10	4.91	4.29	4.28	4.24
Control of Corruption in the Public Service	1	10	6.96	6.84	6.69	6.79
Public Administrative Procedures	1	10		7.19	7.22	7.20
Public Service Delivery	1	10	7.06	7.74	7.52	7.52
E-governance	1	10	2.77	2.87	3.01	3.18

Source: CECODES/RTA/UNDP (2024)

Figure 4: Regional distribution according to the PAR Index



Source: PAR Index 2023 (Ministry of Home Affairs 2024b)

Despite the measurement of 2023 governance efficiency and public administration at provincial level used different methodology and subject to interview, it still reflects people’s satisfaction with a few contents in a similar SIPAS 2023 survey:

The figure above shows that the Southeast Delta region has the highest increasing value, while that of the Tay Nguyen decreased in 2023. 45 out of 63 provinces and municipalities had a high investment attraction rate. 28 scored a maximum grade for business development in terms of quality and quantity (2 points) (Ministry of Home Affairs 2024b).

SIPAS over the past years has shown a positive transition in the ministry and local government leaders’ minds, changing views and actions towards building a serving administration, people-centralizing, and delivering satisfaction to the people. The results also reveal people’s attention, support, and supervision; the administrative agencies are more willing to respond to people’s opinions. The 2023 results (83.15 per cent at the highest) also indicate that the state administrative agencies in local regions need to continue renovating so that society’s expectations can be more fulfilled.

5. Conclusion

Twenty years of Vietnam’s overall administrative reform have shown a positive result: transiting from bureaucratic to serving administrative mechanism. Public service centres are established, and they operate administrative procedures digitally, following one-door mechanism. Modern administration has helped fundamentally transform the procedures and the relationships between state administrative agencies and organizations and citizens to save time and expenses for the people and organizations, fighting against corruption and intransparency and improving governance efficiency and effectiveness. The annual indexes such as PAR Index, SIPAS, and PAPI evidently shows the reform results of the past phases as well as serving as the foundation for the government, ministries, and local governments at all levels to maintain reform to achieve a “democratic, professional, modern, streamlined, effective, efficient, constructively developable, transparent, and people-centred administration.” (Ministry of Home Affairs 2021b)

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# The Evolution of Policy Formulation and Implementation in Vietnam

● Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang

## 1. Policy Formulation and Implementation in Vietnam through Historical Periods

The process of policy formulation and implementation in Vietnam has undergone significant changes since the first Constitution was enacted in 1946, marking major strides in improving the legal system and state governance. These changes reflect the development of Vietnam through various historical periods and the country's political, economic, and social contexts. Below are the key points about how the policy formulation and implementation process has evolved since the first Constitution.

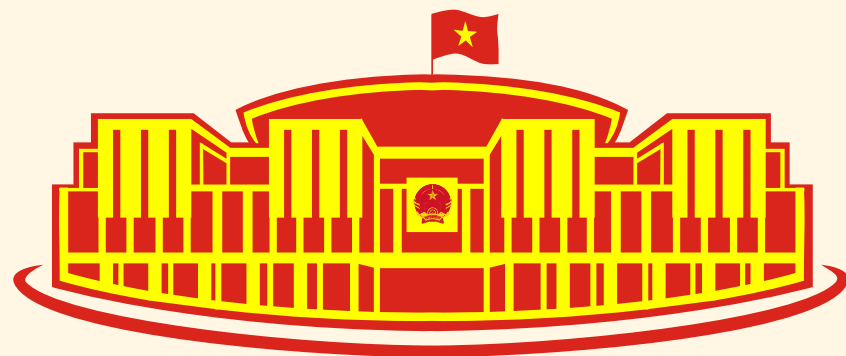
### *The 1946 Constitution Period: Highly Centralized Policy Formulation and Implementation Process*

- **Policy Formulation Process:** The 1946 Constitution was promulgated in the context of a newly independent country, facing major challenges from war and instability. The 1946 Constitution attempted to clearly define the powers: legislative, executive and judicial, accordingly, the legislative power was given to the People's Parliament - the highest organ of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam; the executive power belonged to the Government and the court held the judicial power. The "two-headed executive" regime was also applied in this Constitution of our country. In which, part of the executive power belonged to the President, part belonged to the Prime Minister, but mainly focused on the President (Vietnam National Assembly Electronic Information Portal 2011)
- **Policy Implementation:** The implementation of policies followed a top-down model, with strong direction from local government agencies.

### *The 1959 Constitution Period: Policy Process during the Planned Economy Era*

- **Policy Formulation Process:** The 1959 Constitution was enacted during a period when Vietnam was building socialism in the North with a centrally planned economy, while the country was still divided. The policy formulation process in this period remained highly centralized but started to involve closer coordination between the Party and state agencies in developing socio-economic policies, particularly through five-year plans (Nguyen Bao Ngoc 2015).
- **Policy Implementation:** Policies were implemented with the participation of state-owned economic units and state organizations, reflecting the Soviet-style planned economy, where all activities were controlled and allocated by the state.





## QUỐC HỘI VIỆT NAM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF VIET NAM

The National Assembly of Vietnam

Source: Wiki Commons

### *The 1980 Constitution: Increased Role of the State in Policy Formulation*

- Policy Formulation Process: After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, the 1980 Constitution was enacted during a period of building and developing socialism with a centrally planned and subsidized economy. The policy formulation process in this period still relied on the centralized planning mechanism but was now applied nationwide.
- Policy Implementation: Local governments were tasked with organizing the implementation of policies, but the process faced many difficulties due to financial and infrastructural shortages. The adjustment of policies based on feedback from localities was also very limited.

### *The 1992 Constitution: Fundamental Changes in Policy Formulation after Đổi Mới (Renovation)*

- Policy Formulation Process: The 1992 Constitution was enacted after the Đổi Mới (Renovation) policy in 1986, marking a major turning point in Vietnam's socio-economic development, transitioning from a centrally planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy. This period witnessed a stronger decentralization in the policy formulation process. State agencies, particularly the National Assembly and Government, actively participated in legislation and decision-making. The consultation mechanism was expanded, including expert, business, and public consultations (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper).
- Policy Implementation: Policy implementation became more flexible, with an increased role for non-state economic sectors. Local governments were given more authority in implementing policies, and feedback from society was taken more seriously in adjusting policies.

### *The 2013 Constitution: Broad Participation in the Policy Formulation Process*

- Policy Formulation Process: The 2013 Constitution was enacted in the context of Vietnam's deep international integration and facing many challenges from globalization. This period also saw Vietnam focusing on administrative and legal reforms, emphasizing the importance of good governance, human rights protection, and legal improvements. The 2013 Constitution provided a legal foundation for enhancing transparency and democracy in the policy formulation process. Public participation and the involvement of social organizations in the process were strengthened through public consultations, workshops, and other consultation channels (Vo Tri Hao 2014).
- Policy Implementation: Local governments were given more responsibility for policy implementation, and the oversight process was also enhanced. The evaluation and modification of policies became a critical part of this process, making policies more flexible and suitable for real-world situations.

From the 1946 Constitution to the 2013 Constitution, Vietnam's policy formulation and implementation process has undergone significant changes, reflecting the country's development from the war era, through the centrally planned economy, to the Đổi Mới (Renovation) and international integration period. This process has become increasingly democratic, transparent, and widely participatory, reflecting a shift in state governance from centralization to decentralization and adaptation to international standards.

## 2. The Process of Policy Formulation and Implementation in Vietnam Today

A typical policy cycle begins with policy formulation, followed by policy implementation, and after a period of implementation, policy analysis is conducted to adjust and supplement the policy as needed. Thus, policy formulation is the starting point of the policy cycle. This is a particularly important step. A proper and scientific policy formulation will result in a good policy, laying the foundation for that policy to come into life and achieve high effectiveness. On the contrary, improper policy formulation, which leads to a policy that is not aligned with reality and lacks feasibility, will bring about unwanted consequences during management. These damages are not only temporary and isolated but can have long-term effects, impacting various sectors and industries.

Public policy formulation is a regular task of the State and is established as a process. The public policy formulation process is the sequence of steps to create a public policy. This process is usually carried out under the supervision of state agencies, ensuring that policies meet the national development needs and comply with the Constitution and laws. Broadly speaking, the public policy cycle includes the following main steps:

### 1. Problem Identification

- Origin: Problems can be identified through scientific research, public feedback, organizations, or state management agencies.
- Problem Analysis: There needs to be an evaluation and analysis of the nature and importance of the problem, as well as the factors influencing it.

### 2. Policy Formulation

- Policy Development: Functional agencies (such as ministries and departments) conduct research and draft policy options based on problem analysis. This process often includes consultation with experts, research organizations, and public opinion.
- Consultation: Policy drafts are typically made public to gather feedback from the community and relevant stakeholders, ensuring that the policy is designed in line with practical realities.

### 3. Policy Adoption

- Submission: Once the policy draft is finalized, it is submitted to higher management levels (such as the National Assembly, Government, or People's Council) for review and approval.



Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh chaired the National Urban Conference to disseminate Resolution No. 148/NQ-CP dated November 11, 2022 of the Government.

Source: [https://binhdinh.gov.vn/tin-tuc/hoat-dong-cua-lanh-dao/thu-tuong-pham-minh-chinh-chu-tri-hoi-nghi-do-thi-toan-quoc.html/-strong1/-strong/-strong/-heart:>o:-\(h](https://binhdinh.gov.vn/tin-tuc/hoat-dong-cua-lanh-dao/thu-tuong-pham-minh-chinh-chu-tri-hoi-nghi-do-thi-toan-quoc.html/-strong1/-strong/-strong/-heart:>o:-(h)

- Approval: This process requires the leaders to consider the feasibility, legality, and socio-economic benefits before deciding to approve the policy.

### 4. Policy Implementation

- Organizing Implementation: After approval, the policy is transferred to the responsible agencies for organizing and implementing it in practice.
- Supervision and Adjustment: During implementation, agencies monitor and assess the effectiveness of the policy and can make adjustments if difficulties arise or if the policy does not achieve the intended objectives.

### 5. Policy Evaluation

- Effectiveness Assessment: Agencies and organizations assess the success of the policy based on pre-established criteria. This includes evaluating the economic, social, and public satisfaction aspects.
- Feedback and Improvement: Based on the evaluation results, recommendations for policy adjustments or changes are made to ensure the policy achieves higher effectiveness in the future.

### 6. Policy Termination/Modification

- If the policy is no longer relevant or has achieved its objectives, it can be terminated. In cases where the policy is still needed but requires improvement, the modification process will take place to ensure the policy's adaptability to real-world conditions.

In practice, most of Vietnam's public policies are institutionalized through government resolutions, so the public policy formulation process follows the procedures outlined in the Resolution Issuance of the Law on the Promulgation of Legal Documents of 2015.

### 3. Factors Influencing the Process of Public Policy Formulation and Implementation in Vietnam

The process of policy formulation and implementation is influenced by various factors, including political, economic, social, and international environmental factors. Understanding these factors plays a crucial role in ensuring that the policy process is effective and aligned with real-world conditions. Below is a detailed analysis of the key factors affecting the policy formulation and implementation process:

#### Political Factors

- **Leadership of the Party and State:** In Vietnam, the Communist Party of Vietnam plays a comprehensive leadership role in policy formulation. The Party's resolutions often serve as the foundation for building national policies. Policies related to socio-economic development, national defense, security, and diplomacy are all directed by the Party.
- **Stability of the Political System:** A stable political system facilitates a smooth policy formulation and implementation process, preventing undesirable disruptions. Conversely, political instability can hinder the process, causing sudden changes or interruptions in policy.
- **Decentralization and Local Governance:** In Vietnam, the decentralization between central and local governments has increased in recent years. This allows localities to be more deeply involved in formulating and implementing policies that are suited to the socio-economic conditions of each region.

#### Economic Factors

- **National Economic Situation:** Vietnam's economic development significantly affects the policy formulation and implementation process. When the economy grows, policies tend to focus on promoting investment, improving the business environment, and encouraging international integration. In contrast, during economic hardships, policies often focus on stabilizing the economy, controlling inflation, and supporting businesses.



*National conference to disseminate and implement the Resolution of the 10th Conference of the 13th Party Central Committee*  
Source: <https://baochinhphu.vn/hoi-nghi-toan-quoc-quan-triet-trien-khai-thuc-hien-nghi-quyet-hoi-nghi-lan-thu-muoi-ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang-khoa-xi-ii-102241020094100688.htm#img-lightbox-1>

- **Financial Resources and Budget:** A nation's financial capacity directly impacts the formulation and implementation of policies. Policies that require significant funding, such as infrastructure investment, education, and healthcare, must be balanced with the national budget. Financial shortages can reduce the effectiveness of policy implementation.
- **International Economic Integration:** The process of economic integration, especially participation in free trade agreements and international organizations, has a strong impact on policy formulation. Policies need to be adjusted to align with international regulations and standards, while also creating favorable conditions for foreign investors and enhancing the competitiveness of domestic businesses.

#### Social Factors

- **Population and Demographic Structure:** Demographic changes, such as aging populations, migration, or rapid population growth, greatly affect the formulation and implementation of policies in education, healthcare, labor, and social welfare. For example, as the population ages, policies must be adjusted to meet the needs for healthcare and welfare for the elderly.
- **Public Awareness and Participation:** The awareness and participation of the public in the policy formulation and implementation process are increasingly important. When the public is well-informed about policies and actively contributes feedback, policies will more accurately reflect the needs and desires of society, thus increasing feasibility and effectiveness.

- **Cultural and Traditional Values:** Policies must be compatible with local culture and traditions to be effectively implemented. For instance, in policies regarding family, education, and religion, cultural factors play a key role in the development and adjustment of policies.

#### Legal Factors

- **Legal System and Institutions:** A comprehensive and transparent legal system is essential for ensuring that the policy formulation and implementation process follows the rules. Inconsistencies and overlaps in legal documents can lead to confusion during implementation and, in some cases, violation of the rights of the stakeholders involved.
- **Compliance and Supervision:** The ability to supervise and enforce the law directly affects the effectiveness of policy implementation. If the relevant authorities lack the capacity to monitor, poor implementation may occur, leading to issues such as corruption, waste, or legal violations.

#### International Environmental Factors

- **Foreign Relations and International Integration:** Vietnam's deepening integration into the international community requires policy formulation to align with international commitments, such as trade agreements and environmental and climate change commitments. This increases competition and demands that policies be flexible to adapt to the rapidly changing international environment.
- **Pressure from International Organizations:** International organizations such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or the World Trade Organization (WTO) have a significant impact on policy formulation and implementation through financial support programs, policy advice, or reform pressure. These factors create requirements for transparency, efficiency, and accountability in the policy-making and implementation process.
- **Climate Change and Global Issues:** Global challenges such as climate change, energy crises, and pandemics also affect the development of policies on sustainable development, renewable energy, and disaster risk management.

#### Technological Factors

- **Technological Development:** Advances in science and technology are creating significant changes in all aspects of social life. Achievements in information

technology, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data are creating new opportunities for data-driven policy formulation and implementation. This enables state agencies to predict trends and make more accurate policy decisions.

- **Digital Transformation:** In the context of e-government and digital transformation, the process of policy formulation and implementation is gradually incorporating digital technologies, enhancing transparency, efficiency, and public participation in the decision-making process.

Understanding these factors and their influence on the policy process is essential for ensuring that policies are well-formulated and effectively implemented, resulting in greater public benefits and alignment with national goals.

### 4. Some Issues to Be Addressed in the Process of Policy Formulation and Implementation

- **Public policies are not keeping up with current realities:** The socio-economic landscape is always in motion, and many new and pressing issues arise that require policy solutions. However, policies often lag behind, failing to intervene and address these issues in a timely manner. Many policies are issued but cannot be implemented in reality due to various reasons.
- **The current policy formulation process in Vietnam follows basic steps:** These steps include setting the policy agenda, developing and proposing policy options, and policy adoption. However, this process is still influenced by outdated practices, making it closed, internal, and sometimes subject to the subjective "imposition" of state agencies that have the authority to issue policies. From the initial stage of setting the policy agenda to the development and proposal of policy options, the entire process is still managed by state agencies, with minimal participation from experts, scientists, businesses, and the public.
- **Frequent changes in legal documents:** In some sectors, regulations are regularly changed. As society continually evolves over time and in response to the changing environment, policies need to be adjusted accordingly. However, constant policy changes can create difficulties for the entities responsible for implementing the policies and the target groups of



these policies. In the economic sector, particularly in investment, the constant shifts in legal documents and policies create anxiety for businesses, limiting investment flows into Vietnam.

- Limitations in policy implementation: In Vietnam, policy implementation still faces many constraints such as delays, inconsistency, and lack of coordination, particularly in economic and social welfare policies. The process of institutionalizing policy directives into practical action remains slow. Coordination among agencies and ministries is not synchronized, and there is no clear coordination mechanism in place. The dissemination and communication of policies are often delayed, and the methods used for communication are inappropriate, leading to incomplete or even incorrect understanding of the policies by organizations, agencies, and individuals. In practice, there are still many limitations in the coordination between relevant agencies in the policy-making process. Coordination between ministries and local authorities remains weak, and there is no clear mechanism for this coordination in the policy formulation process, which results in incomplete and inaccurate information being provided. Additionally, the resources for policy implementation are limited, with financial resources still heavily dependent on a "request-approval" mechanism. The capacity and qualifications of public officials and civil servants, especially their attitude toward policy formulation and implementation, are still lacking. Moreover, the inspection and supervision processes are often slow and superficial, negatively affecting the overall policy implementation process.
- Policy formulation and implementation are still largely manual: There has been little application of science and information technology in the policy formulation and implementation process. The policy-making process requires big data and extensive information across many different sectors. To gather a large amount of information and process it accurately, policy-makers must apply information technology optimally in this process. However, in practice, information collection and processing are still conducted manually, with no shared data system in place. There has been little application of information technology in information collection and processing, and public platforms are not used to gather public input from citizens and businesses in the process of proposing policies.

## 5. Conclusion

The process of policy formulation and implementation in Vietnam has evolved significantly over time, from a highly centralized approach during the early constitutional periods to a more decentralized, participatory model in recent years. However, despite these advances, there remain several pressing challenges that need to be addressed for public policies to be more effective and aligned with the fast-changing socio-economic landscape. The gap between policy and practice, the frequent shifts in legal frameworks, limitations in coordination among government agencies, and the manual nature of policy data collection are key issues that hinder the full potential of policy outcomes. Addressing these challenges through the application of technology, improving collaboration between stakeholders, and ensuring greater public participation will be crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of Vietnam's policy-making process. By doing so, Vietnam can better meet the needs of its citizens, adapt to global standards, and continue its socio-economic development in a sustainable manner.



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